

at this blockade, including a christian group performing a church service before one of the gates, an action which police were initially reluctant to break up. In actions aimed specifically at conversion of miners, a group of doctors attempted to visit their town to explain the dangers that they faced, while others distributed leaflets.

7.6.2 Women's actions and nonviolence

Many of our SU group, including Virginia Rigney, saw the nuclear industry as being

inextricably linked to oppressive male power structures. To emphasise this relationship I felt it was extremely important for women to make distinct protests at Roxby (1984:13).

An area of approximately 500 square metres was designated as a women's only space, for camping, meeting and planning actions⁹. One involved four women who walked to the pilot plant where

We planned to cut the surrounding fence wire and get in and chain ourselves to the yellowcake storeroom ... [This was] a very strengthening and challenging enterprise. The physical difficulties of walking that distance without lights (to avoid detection) were compounded by the heavy security that had to be avoided ... [T]he four of us made it to the plant, but we were detected while cutting the fence, as it was then quite light. These night actions had the potential to be seen as commando-style raids. Certainly the straight media portrayed them in this fashion. The four of us decided that we wanted a women's only action to try and avoid such attitudes which we had seen being expressed by some males at action planning meetings (Rigney 1984:13).

This is a clear example of women tackling issues of violence (or interpretations thereof by media), and shows how non-sexist and inclusive campaigns benefit the movement. Although arguably they were continuing guerilla-style tactics, these would at least be seen in a different light with women involved, and presumably contain less threat of violence. Another action further shows the determination of some women to avoid any whiff of violence, and the debate they had with others keen for more militant tactics. Some sixty women approached the lease gate,

⁹ A recent action purely by women had been in 1983 at Pine Gap, Northern Territory; as at Greenham Common they called for peace and nuclear disarmament (see Burgmann 1993:203-204; Kearns 2004:109-124).

moved up the side, grasped hold of the fencing, and began to shake and rock it. Suddenly it began to come away, so we pulled it all down and sat on it! It was one of the most empowering experiences I have had. The ease and speed with which we did it surprised both us and the police, of whom there were only a few on hand. Women who did not want to be in an arrestable situation wove long strips of cloth through the main gate. Soon however, police reinforcements arrived and they proceeded to simply pick women off the road who were still around. Eight were arrested. To plan this half-hour action we had three meetings which probably went for five hours over a few days. At these, strong doubts were expressed by some women as to the validity of doing a semi-violent action (ie pulling down a fence). Others did not see this as a violent action, since it was not directed to an individual and we had only planned at that stage to rattle the fence. Others saw that as women we could expose the fragility of such barriers by taking direct actions. In the end we agreed that the action would have two aspects, that those who wanted to be entirely peaceful could weave the cloth, and those that wanted to pull the fence down, could (Rigney 1984:13).

Here, despite a lack of unanimity, a valid compromise was found through consensus. However, despite being empowering for some, such property damage did not slow the mining *or* create favourable media which would advance the campaign, so its long-term effectiveness is questionable. This has parallels with a 2003 discussion I had with a woman recently returned from Palestine, who argued that stone-throwing is empowering for Palestinian youth. While this may be true, it is counter-productive for their aim of ending the Israeli occupation, since it continues the cycle of violence and mutual distrust (see Sharp 1973:597). This is the importance to movements of nonviolence training and planning;- to advance long-term aims through the development of thoughtful, disciplined strategies.

7.6.3 Direct action

Our affinity group decided to engage in a night action. I described this shortly afterwards in a piece of 'gonzo'¹⁰ journalism, which hopefully conveys some of the drama, emotion and surreal nature of the action. For some reason, another man and I were presumed to be competent navigators, and were given the task of leading twenty-five people the twenty-

¹⁰ I had been influenced by this highly subjective, often fanciful form of journalism popularised in the 1970s by Hunter S. Thompson in *Rolling Stone* magazine.

five kilometres to the pilot plant. It was only after a few hours that I realised that my confident, extroverted co-leader had even less idea about navigation than I did!

... We started at midnight and stumbled through the red sandhills guided by various stars and planets.

It started getting light when we were still a few kilometres from the monstrosity. People began to run. Three people had disappeared – some didn't care, others panicked. We had to get there before dawn. I was up the back and spotted one guy stopping. He ran suspiciously to the side with a large backpack. The thought occurred to me that he might be one of the 'agents provocateurs' who had infiltrated our camp. Already, some actions had been spoilt because the police... knew about them.¹¹ He kept urging me to run on ahead, fueling my suspicions. I moved on, straining to hear the crackle of a radio. There was only silence.

He caught me up and we ran over a ridge to find a huge flat claypan stretching before us.¹² Ahead we could see the tip of the pilot plant. To the right, greyish-purple fingers of cloud were pointing downwards out of an orange sunrise. I was no longer able to tell whether I was awake or asleep. I ran across the claypan, unsure whether it was a sacred site or not. I realised I was alone. Then I lost myself in some type of fantasy world – all around me were people running like lemmings towards oblivion. Picnic at Hanging Rock - we would run till we disappeared. Then I was at the other side of the claypan and alone again.

I climbed a ridge and there, rising out of my beautiful desert, was a huge mechanical monster, gouging away at the guts of the earth. Spotlights lit up the surrounds and gave it an evil, eerie look. Armed Patrols with German Shepherds marched inside the barbed wire, whilst above, the stormy sky looked as though it would crack open and devour the plant at any moment. I found a hiding spot under a shrub and waited as the others [somehow behind now] straggled across the dried up flats ... We regrouped on the ridge, discussed hallucinations – about 10 people had them simultaneously – took photos, ate chocolate and said goodbye to a reporter from the Melbourne Age who came along for the walk. He was one of the few media people who'd looked at our side, and he was much appreciated.

We marched defiantly down to the gates and sat down. Police and Roxby Management Service [RMS] thugs [sic] came out and stood around worriedly discussing us as we broke out sandwiches and stuck up banners. We were all a bit scared so we sang songs and held hands in a circle. The voice of Big Brother boomed out of an intercom somewhere inside the complex, warning us to leave. Workers lounged about, smoking and laughing at us, though the laughter looked put on. An RMS guard came out and gave us a Mussolini-type edict and then stamped

¹¹ There are persistent stories that the CANE headquarters in Adelaide, a centre of anti-Roxby activism, had been infiltrated by two detectives.

¹² Several Kokatha sacred sites around Roxby are situated on claypans.

off. By this time there were about forty police hanging about, waiting for orders from their superior. They looked more nervous than us. Finally, they came up to each of us and asked if we were willing to leave. 'No thanks', and we were led off to the paddy wagon. We all gave our names as John Burke¹³ of Maralinga, were photographed and trundled off ... At Woomera Gaol we were thrown into something that looked like a North Coast beer garden. They tried to give us meat sandwiches again so most of us went to sleep in protest ... (Branagan 1984b:4-5).

We mocked our cage-like jail by imitating monkeys. Then I thought I may get a chance to speak at this court-case, so I withdrew from the group mentally and prepared a speech. A makeshift court was set up in the Woomera police station, because the nearest court was several hundred kilometres away. The magistrate was given time off from his usual job to preside over our cases, wrote Meikle (1984:25), who described the process as a 'kangaroo court'¹⁴. This time we were processed individually and alphabetically, and the magistrate asked if I had anything to say. No-one till then had taken up his offer, so he appeared surprised when I proceeded to give a host of reasons why I had felt it necessary to break the law. These included the problem of waste disposal, the contribution to nuclear bombs, and the ignoring of land rights of people who had owned the land for tens of thousands of years. He allowed me to finish, and I could see a somewhat different countenance on him. He perhaps understood that we were not a dirty rabble (despite our appearance, after a fortnight of travelling and camping in red, caking sand) but had valid reasons for our actions. Nevertheless, he convicted me of 'Trespass', fining me several hundred dollars. Other protestors proceeded to give (often lengthy) reasons for their opposition to uranium mining. Although the magistrate's respect for us seemed to grow, all my comrades were found guilty, and fined.

7.6.4 Traditional owners

Most of the white population of nearby Andamooka were hostile and chased some protestors out of town; the Aboriginal population, in contrast, was supportive and

¹³ Burke, a Royal Australian Airforce technician based at Maralinga in the early 1960s, campaigned against alleged government cover-ups following Aboriginal deaths and environmental damage from Maralinga nuclear tests in 1963. He died of stomach cancer in May 1984 (Varney 2000).

welcoming. Strong links were able to be made with the Kokatha because the Kokatha had not experienced the tokenism and exploitation that Tasmanian Aboriginal people had experienced during the Franklin (see Doyle 2000:137).

CNFA guidelines (1983a:9) stipulated “No action or behaviour which is offensive to the Kokatha people”, while the Kokatha explained the places to avoid, and passed on stories of significance:

According to Kokatha legend, there lies beneath the sacred sites a yellow and black lizard, which if disturbed will rise up and destroy the planet. It is no surprise to discover that geologists made bee-lines for sacred sites, and often discovered the yellow and black of uranium beneath them. What is obscene is that the mining companies then claim through the capitalist media that the aborigines wait till something has been discovered, and then declare it a sacred site (Branagan 1984b:4)

There were differing levels of involvement with the Kokatha, with the long-term primarily working-class members of the blockade being those closest to and most supportive of the Aboriginal community. As Meikle (1984: 26) writes:

The greatest excess of the operation must ... be the treatment received by the Kokatha Aborigines. Without compensation or consultation, they have been denied access to their most revered sacred site. On the eve of National Aborigines Day, I witnessed a chilling sight. The tribe had built a bonfire at the base of a large acacia tree. The fire emanating from the burning tree was enormous, and around it the Kokatha were engaged in an angered frenzy. In the time that I had talked to them it became obvious that they wanted the mine to leave and wanted the return of their main sacred site as well as two claypans of lesser significance. There was no question of financial compensation.

While some Kokatha said that it was too late to do anything and that we should stay away because of the dangers unleashed by mining, Elders welcomed our presence:

For Aboriginal day a large communal feast was organised. After street theatre and guitar recitations, Ray, an elder of the Kokatha, declared all blockaders officially ‘Blackfella’. The celebrations, among the most enjoyable I have experienced, went on until dawn, the friendships began there I will never forget (Meikle 1984: 26).

For many of the students, direct action at Roxby instigated their first close contact with Aboriginal people, and many, such as Meikle and myself, left with a better understanding

¹⁴ Unfortunately, what Meikle wrote about this ‘dubious’ process was censored by the student editors.

of the Kokatha, their culture and strengths, oppression and challenges. In relation to the thesis' first question of nonviolence development, eco-pax moved towards being a more holistic and inclusive movement, with significantly more and better interaction with Aboriginal people than at the Franklin. I return this issue in section 8.6.

7.6.5 Street-theatre

At a morning meeting, a suggestion was made that street-theatre be performed during an action at the gates. Three or four of us agreed, and in a few hours, workshopped a short piece involving a character called 'Hog Pork' (Bob Hawke), who was denying any of the problems of uranium mining. For example, he ridiculed the idea of (invisible) radon gas being released into the atmosphere, daring anyone to point it out. I was 'volunteered' to play Hog Pork, and possibly because of past experience in school theatre and in writing for radio¹⁵, I wrote and performed most of the piece. As it was scheduled for the next day, we had to learn our lines and rehearse under a fair amount of pressure. Added to this was the pressure of performing before a large crowd of protestors, media, mounted police and security guards. There was also the possibility of arrest. Nevertheless, we performed the piece and it was well received by protestors, judging by their brief but encouraging comments that it was effective or interesting. They appreciated our remembering many lines, and 'having a go'. Being one of several actions, it added to the diversity of the protest. As I discuss in section 13.3.2.4, diversity has a role in opening as many avenues for participation as possible, - democratising the movement and aiding the nonviolence tenet of inclusivity.

We performed it again the next day, under worse conditions. It was extremely hot, and a blustery wind was buffeting everyone with stinging slaps of sand. We had been living in uncomfortable makeshift camps for some weeks now, surrounded by hostility. Police too were living far from home; some were enjoying it, others were annoyed and showed little

¹⁵ In 1983 I had learned to produce and present radio programmes on Sydney's *Radio Skid Row* (2RSR-FM), and often collaborated with friends on satirical skits.

respect for our right to protest¹⁶. Tempers were fraying and it was difficult to keep the attention of the crowd. While we performed, it seemed as though verbal skirmishes were happening all along the fence, with it only a matter of time before there were more arrests and perhaps violence. It was difficult to make ourselves heard above the wind, the arguments and the roar of vehicles. In addition, someone had offered me a bottle of beer just before commencing. In my nervousness I had drunk too much, and this impaired my performance.

Despite its drawbacks, the theatre still received some favourable feedback, and provided a topic for conversations with police, an early element of conversion. One policeman with whom I had become friendly commented that he enjoyed it, but thought the first performance was better. His feedback let me know that police listen to street-theatre, particularly if it is humorous. This continued my informal 'reflection-upon-action' - begun at the Franklin - into the psychology of dealing with, befriending and attempting to convert police to a particular viewpoint. Initially fearful of police (and I found some who were violent, threatening or intolerant), I would develop over the years several friendships with police. Like anyone, they responded negatively if threatened, shouted at or preached to. Arguments presented with humour seemed more likely to engage on an emotional as well as an intellectual level, an issue examined in section 13.2.1.1. Our play may also have communicated information to or educated some protestors, or reinforced their beliefs (see Curtis & Curtis 2004:3). Confidence in these beliefs may have been secured when they were verbalised or stated in an unusual way, or when nuclear industry propaganda was exposed and ridiculed (this is discussed in section 13.2.5).

7.6.6 Lessons learned

Street-theatre at Roxby was a valuable experience for me. With some assistance I performed a similar 'Hog Pork' skit at the 1991 AIDEX arms protest in Canberra (see Perkins 1991), with the previous experience being very helpful, both in the writing and performance, and in practical aspects such as makeup, hair, costume, organising

¹⁶ This right would later be examined comprehensively in a federal seminar and book (Human Rights Commission 1986).

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amplification and seeking alternatives to alcohol to quell my nervousness, such as exercise, meditation, and sedative herbal teas. It was a relatively simple matter to recall Hawke's accent and inflections. It was also easier to perform before police - though this time there were even more police and I had nightmares for some weeks afterwards. These performances gave me the confidence to create a number of other street-theatre pieces over the years, and thus aided my evolution as an activist. They also taught me how enduring an impromptu piece of theatre can be - some fifteen years later a video of it made by Dean Jeffries (see Jeffries 2005) was shown in the Lismore Art Gallery as part of the growing number of exhibitions about protests.

7.6.7 Nonviolence at Roxby II

The fact that there was less violence at this blockade is attributable to the greater profile of nonviolence, prior to and during the blockade. Many people had been appalled at the violence of the previous year, and there was a conscious attempt to rectify it through more thorough training, and referring activists to groups such as Greenpeace for further information on nonviolence. According to one newspaper article, at the time there was also a phenomenal growth of the Australian peace movement, with the number of groups growing from six to ninety, and women accounting for much of the rising membership (Ferrell 1984:40). This probably contributed to the profile of nonviolence, since nonviolence is closely allied to peace activism, and as we saw earlier, the women's actions incorporated lively debate on nonviolence.

Another important development was the use of tactics outside orthodox nonviolence. The Roxby blockades featured many actions which were more militant than those that occurred at the Franklin, yet which, as I argue in section 11.4.1, should still be regarded as nonviolent. This militancy is probably attributable to the more radically-democratic nature of the Roxby blockades. Since Roxby affinity groups were given autonomy to decide their own actions, without having to seek permission from any group meeting or hierarchy, there was far greater freedom for groups to be militant if they so desired. As a reaction against the hierarchical nature of the Franklin, there had been an emphasis on complete freedom in the first Roxby blockade, freedom which had led to violence by some. The second Roxby

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blockade found middle ground between tightly-controlled actions and absolute freedom. The Roxby II training, with its emphasis on individual responsibility, helped to produce a more balanced, nonviolent blockade than the first one, with a greater variety of actions, including militant and artistic ones.

It would be misleading to suggest that we felt demoralised or isolated. The atmosphere in the camp gave everyone a natural sense of euphoria. The joy and enthusiasm that was generated, sustained many people through many days without sleep (Meikle 1984:26).

7.6.7.1 Consensus decision-making

As at the Franklin, the Roxby blockade was not only aimed at opposing environmental damage, but also challenging the paradigms which allowed such decisions to be made:

Consensus decision-making is an experiment in transferring power back into the hands of the individual. It is an attempt to re-emphasise individual responsibility in an atmosphere of cooperation and non-violence ... As a blockader, I have experienced the tremendous satisfaction of working through our differences to a better understanding of myself and others, culminating in decisions which have formed the basis of many successful actions (Smekal 1984:6).

Rigney too found autonomous consensus decision-making valuable:

One of the very positive things about the blockade was the decision making process in regard to actions. Because most were small-scale actions, it meant you could plan an action that could focus on an issue that you were particularly concerned with, and you therefore did not have to compromise yourself or others. Larger actions involving a number of affinity groups often entailed long preparatory meetings. Often quite distinct differences of opinion would emerge, but with our consensus decision-making training in mind, we would try and work towards a position that would accommodate all views. I found this ... very valuable in that it made me think quite deeply about my own presence at Roxby as well as introduce me to many other women's opinions and convictions (1984:13).

The criticisms of consensus evident at the Franklin were less strident for Roxby, suggesting that its benefits were emerging and that practice had improved its use. This important nonviolence development is discussed in section 12.3.3.

7.6.8 Arts at Roxby II

Ferrell reported that with the emergence of a strong, feminised peace movement there had been a concomitant shift away from direct action: “[t]he emphasis is now on educating the

community” (1984:40). As I discuss in section 13.2.6, the arts are particularly effective as a tool of education. This is borne out by the women’s actions, which were particularly artistic, involving banners, painted faces and chanting, with a common song being ‘Don’t be too polite girls’ (*Honi Soit* 1984a:13). One symbolic action included a

large women’s symbol [made] out of strips of cloth [which was] half in and half out of the fence...This was designed to show how we women refused to recognize the artificial barrier made by the fence ... In all of these actions songs were constantly sung. One of the favourites, sung with great gusto, was ‘We are ace, we are cool, We are women and we rule’. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, not surprisingly, reported this as ‘We are tough, we are cruel’ (Rigney 1984:13).

Blockaders Berrier and Worsoe wrote that this

may seem like an insignificant piece of misreporting, but by misquoting the song, it essentially misquoted the blockade. No-one blockading was there to be ‘tough’ or ‘cruel’, and if the song proclaimed that women ruled, it was only in the context of reclaiming some of the awesome power that male mining directors and heads of state have over the future of the world (1984:16).

Rigney also gave accolades to the presence at Roxby II of women veterans of Greenham Common, Honeymoon, Roxby 1983 and Pine Gap protests:

Their songs and experiences helped to keep us aware of the many thousands of women who had already been involved in protest action and gave us the strength and energy to ensure that there will be many thousands more (Rigney 1984:13).

Through music, these veterans empowered newcomers to be confident and act, and ensured continuity of the movement. In this artistic way radical history was passed on, largely orally and at a grassroots level, a history far different to that reported by the mainstream media.

7.6.8.1 Mainstream media bias

Despite nonviolence training, many flamboyant actions, and our best intentions, much unfavourable media coverage was given to the blockade. This coverage was initially favourable, with the 18th August edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald* giving human interest stories and describing the nonviolence philosophy. What followed however, were scant, often biased reports. Berrier and Worsoe’s analysis of Roxby media coverage found that violent intentions were implied in at least one article:

where the discovery of ‘a cache of possible weapons’ ... was reported ... near the Olympic Dam airstrip, inside the lease area (p4 SMH 20/8). The weapons to which they constantly referred, included ‘what appeared to be home-made flares and some metal objects’ (1984:16).

Our group encountered no-one who planned to use weapons. Such objects could equally have been amusements for bored miners, or deliberately placed there to incriminate blockaders, possibilities which the paper did not explore. Other articles reported scathing attacks on demonstrators by a police prosecutor, but gave only the briefest details of what they had actually done:

The rest of the blockaders’ activities were summed into the vague phrase ‘damaging property, and provoking incidents’. Nowhere ... did the journalist clarify what sort of property (usually graffiti on galvanized mining buildings - never residences), and what sort of incidents. There is only one side of the story. Reports in the Australian with ‘Fort Roxby’ as the headlines (18/8 p3) and Nationwide’s program ‘Andamooka Under siege’ all smack of the same military paranoia under which both the press and the police (with their truckloads of horses, water guns, bulldozers and cement-filled 40 gallon drums) operate (Berrier & Worsoe 1984:16).

The media was also highly selective, focusing on “less respectable people (eg lesbians)” (Runciman 1986:178)¹⁷. This was because:

Stereotypes of hippies and ... other ‘oddities’ are far more readable than peaceful good relations with the police, or a troop of nurses and doctors distributing health pamphlets to miners ... When it was realized in the first week that the blockade’s actions weren’t going to comply by providing the media with the sensational headlines they demand, most [media] left, leaving only one camera to represent the commercial stations throughout Australia (Berrier & Worsoe 1984:16).

These women’s article goes on to note the frequent misquotations of the number of arrestees, and suggest reasons for the minimal and biased coverage, including the essentially conservative nature of the mainstream media, because of its economic interests, the politics of the owners and editors, and its need to sustain a wide audience.

¹⁷ Thomas (1984:10) similarly notes with regard to the Lakeside protest that, with the occasional exception of the ABC, ‘[m]ost [media] reports attempted to caricature the protesters...The stereotype that emerged was of a dope crazed social reject, who has nothing in common with ordinary, decent hard working people’.

On 3 September 1984, I wrote a letter to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* from the blockade, complaining about its coverage, but frustratingly for me the letter was not published. Encountering such poor media, however, radicalised us, by removing our naïve beliefs about its impartiality. It showed us the importance of exploring measures (such as training and discipline) to minimise violence, and ways (such as the arts) to obtain attention and favourable coverage. Moreover, it was a catalyst for many of the SU blockaders to seek alternative media outlets such as student newspapers and radio, and to present our own accounts of the protest, in order to sway public opinion. This move towards activist control of media coverage is an important development in the nonviolence area of conversion, and is analysed in 13.2.9.

7.6.8.2 Independent and artistic media

The *Honi Soit* articles about the blockade further show the use of the arts in proselytising. A number of photographs and cartoons feature either as accompaniment to articles or standing alone as statements. The photos are primarily taken by the activists themselves, featuring dramatic action shots or the beauty of the desert and Aboriginal children. There are cartoons by blockaders and supporters, or appropriated. Original illustrations were drawn specifically for some articles, an example being Adam Long's picture of an Aboriginal custodian mutated by radiation (see Figure 61). The lyrics to several songs are printed, such as 'The People Fought the Battle of Roxby Downs' by the Painters and Blockers affinity group (1984:17) and 'I like the flowers' (*Honi Soit* 1984b:6). There is a poem/speech by Chief Seattle (1984:6). There is unconventional text such as Hannam's 'Roxby Diary' (1984:7) and Franzi's aphorism (1984:17), and gonzo journalism such as Leslie (1984:17), Meikle (1984) and my article, as well as more conventional reports. It is an impressive collection of anti-nuclear text and images.

7.6.8.3 Powerful Landscape

The landscape too impacted on us, inspiring poetic descriptions. Despite the hectic schedule of action, the desert was conducive to deep meditation, and created for many of us surreal or mystical experiences.

My arrival ... was initially joyful. A brilliant crimson sunrise showed the desert to be in full flower. The rich dark green of the vegetation highlighted the rust red soil.

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The early morning was alive with wedge tail eagles, crows and kangaroos (Meikle 1984: 24).

Sunrise. The beauty of the place overwhelms you ... Today it's rolling dunes and swales of bright orange earth. The sky's a deep kodachrome blue (Leslie 1984 :17).

[W]hat we saw and experienced was one of the most breathtaking landscapes imaginable – red, red sand, with vivid splashes of red, green, purple, blue and yellow in the dunes, vast claypans and saltlakes on the flats. At night the stars lit the scene with a brilliant display that no city dweller could ever dream of (Ingram 1984:5).

The blockade enabled a number of young city-based people such as myself to experience a landscape we may never have otherwise visited. This journey from the populous coast to the quiet interior added a spatial/physical element to the blockade that made it particularly memorable for many, and helped produce in us the deep learning that was discussed in section 2.3.3. This is further discussed in section 14.3.

7.7 CONCLUSION

The Roxby blockades differed significantly from the Franklin, in that the actions tended to be more varied, and included more militant forms of action, including minor property damage. This was due to a less orthodox view of nonviolence by the organisers, and more decentralised organisation, with affinity groups having the freedom to choose their own actions. However, perhaps as a reaction against the Franklin, there was less emphasis on nonviolence at Roxby 1983, and consequently the initial actions were violent and counter-productive. The second Roxby blockade, in contrast, was more explicitly nonviolent, and had an atmosphere more conducive to conversion. It was hampered, however, by poor media coverage, showing the need for the art-form of journalism (including independent media outlets) to be further developed by activists. Both Roxby blockades exhibited considerable artistic activism, which helped to avert violence, had tactical advantages for civil disobedience, and created partial conversion of some opponents. As with the Franklin, we saw music encouraging direct action and fortifying participants, and symbolic acts communicating messages and attracting media attention. In the Lakeside protests, the arts showcased an alternative, more holistic form of politics.

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Although the blockades failed to stop the mine, the movement was strengthened by the experience. There was an important confluence of nomadic forest activists working with mainstream conservationists and traditional owners, in tandem with students, feminists, unionists, pacifists and religious organisations. This as well as the considerable expertise gained about blockading and about the dangers of uranium mining helped build the movement into one which would later succeed in Jabiluka (see Chapter Ten), with Roxby veterans such as the FoE organization, Benny Zable, and myself being involved there. Opposition to Roxby has continued with several blockades in the 1990s, and WMC is currently the subject of legal proceedings, with Arabunna Elder Kevin Buzzacott (see Figure 107) charging it with acts of genocide, largely through its depletion of mound springs water (Doyle 2000:xiv)¹⁸.

A consequence of my arrests occurred in 1985. I had not paid my fines on principle, and was hitchhiking to a commune on the mountainous border between Queensland and NSW, having finished a Bachelor of Arts and finally 'escaped' Sydney. The police questioned me (despite hitching being legal), checked their records and found that I had a warrant outstanding. I had no money or income, having determined to live without possessions, so I spent three days in the cell at Coffs Harbour police station.

The blockade and training workshops had an important role in radicalising the activists, evidenced by the enlightened and mature ideas expressed in the impassioned articles about the blockade. Lee, Smekal, Oldroyd and I would go on to 'The Bike Ride' (see Chapter Nine), while Doug Ferguson moved to Ecuador and 'helped three tribes secure ... their ancestral lands, saved more than a million hectares of pristine rainforest in reserves and National Parks, and helped establish sustainable agriculture projects (Jeffries & Simon (n.d.). Vincent would write some excellent environmental articles, Meikle became involved in the Tuntable Falls communal living experiment, and the late Diane Ingram would continue to be involved in pacifist activities, as well as working with ex-prisoners and the

¹⁸ The company is currently engaged in similar acts of dispossession in the Philippines, according to Doyle (2000:x-xvii).

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homeless (see her obituary - *Sydney Morning Herald* 1999:29). As she wrote of the Sydney University students who went to Roxby:

When they returned, all felt that the week spent there had changed them forever (1984:5).



Roxby Downs protests . . . a mine worker struggles with demonstrators as a car bypasses a blockade at the Olympic Dam mine yesterday.

Figure 55: Scuffle at Roxby 1983.

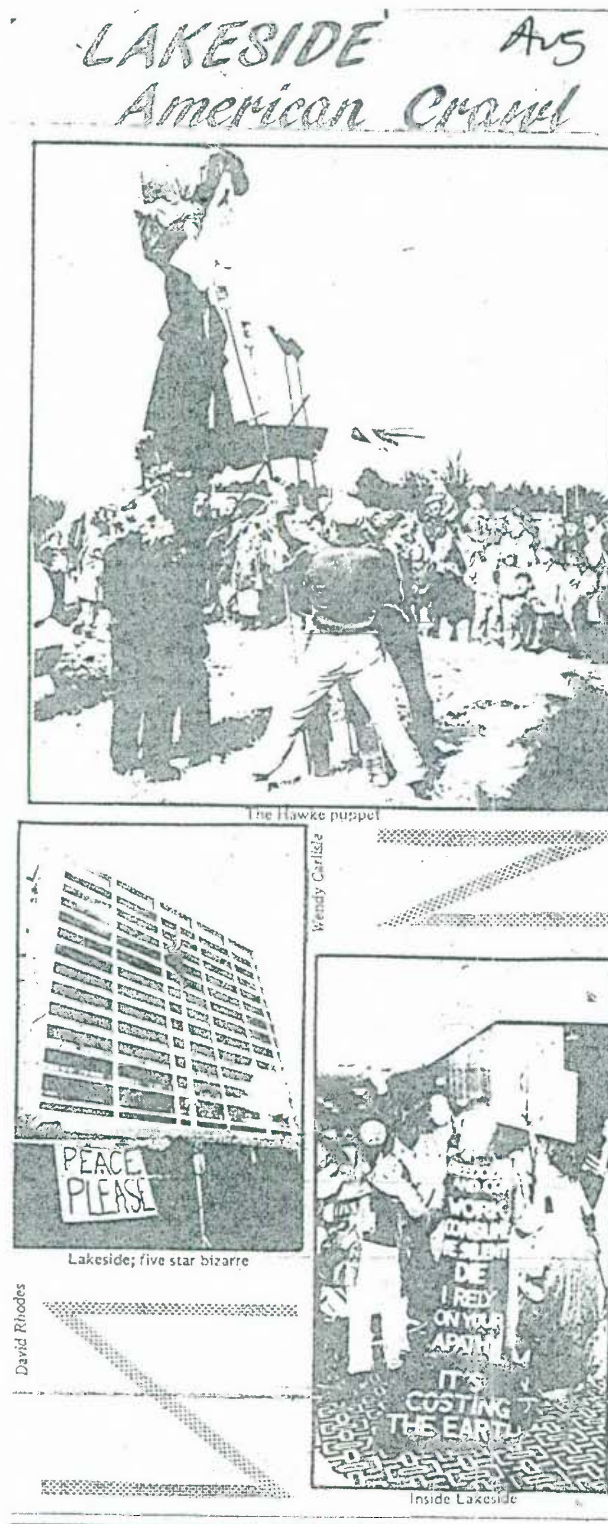


Figure 56: Arts at Lakeside action: Hawke puppet, banner, Benny Zable performance.



Figure 58: Postcard depicting blockaders. Woman on left was part of 'Hog Pork' theatre.

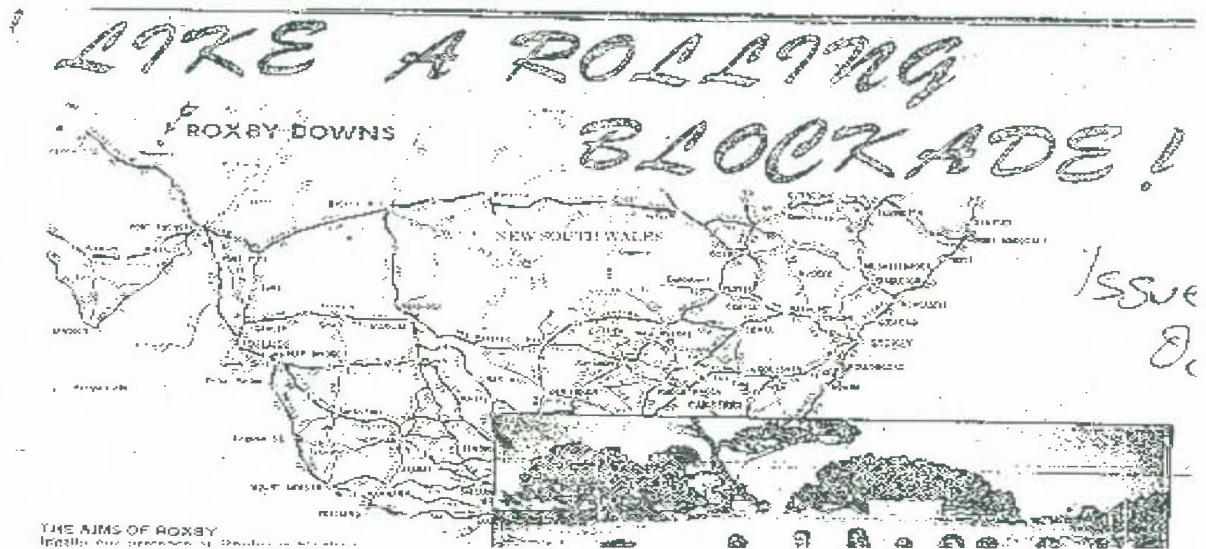


Figure 59: Map depicting journey of Sydney University blockaders.



Figure 60: Protesters sing and clap as they await arrest near mine shaft at Roxby Downs (in Cohen 1997:128).

occasionally, were uplined or inspired and then left again. They claimed it was good to spend some time near these sites but that too much could be dangerous. Perhaps this explains why most people feel fantastic for the first week or two here, and then develop crashing headaches and depression.

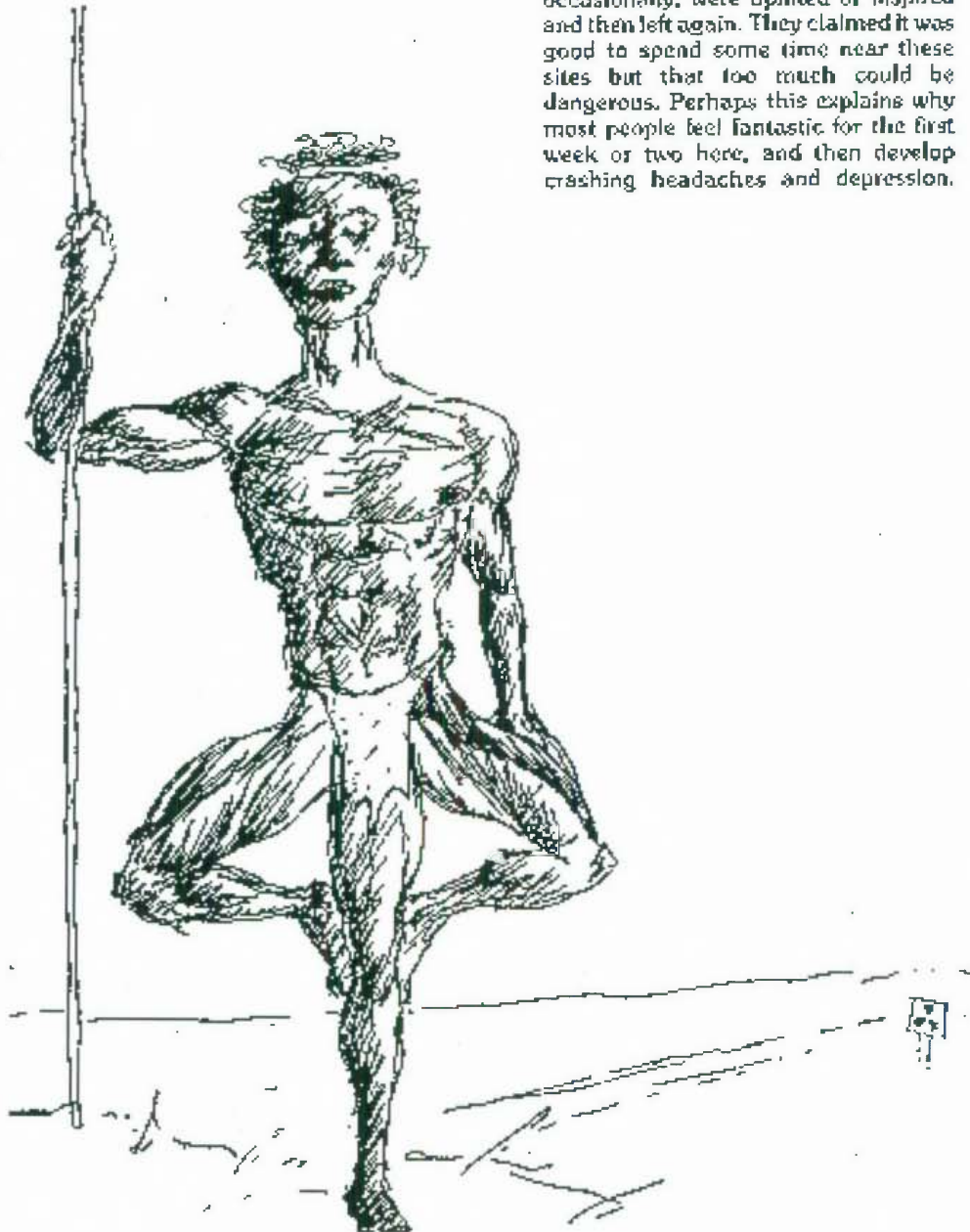


Figure 61: Illustration by Adam Long accompanying Branagan (1984b).



Figure 62: Badges from Roxby campaign. Top one reads 'Stop Yellowcake Bob', referring to then Labor prime minister Bob Hawke. It echoed the WWII epithet of 'Pig-iron Bob', given to then prime minister Robert Menzies.