



**THE  
#CLIMATESTRIKE  
MOVEMENT AND THE  
FUTURE OF UNIONISM**

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Authorised by Maxine Sharkey , General Secretary, NSW Teachers Federation,  
23-33 Mary Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010. 21016

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# DEDICATION

**TO THE ACTIVISTS OF THIS AND PREVIOUS GENERATIONS WHO GAVE THEIR ALL IN THE HOPE OF A BETTER WORLD. WE OWE NO LESS TO THE GENERATIONS TO COME.**



# PREAMBLE

**THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FIRST NATIONS PEOPLES, THEIR LANDS, WATERS AND SURROUNDING ISLANDS OF THIS CONTINENT HAVE BEEN ILL-SERVED AND ILL-TREATED ACROSS 233 YEARS OF COLONIAL INVASION AND OCCUPATION.**

In terms of its capacity to threaten simultaneously the wellbeing and very lives of every human being on Earth, the climate movement's nearest historical analogue is that of the anti-nuclear movement. These stakes place it among the first of the truly global struggles in the history of our species and, if we continue to shirk from it, likely the last.



The genocide perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by the colonial nation is mirrored in the ecocide committed by forces of industrialisation and capitalism.

Climate action must proceed with climate justice to restore the health of the land, waters, air, rivers, forests and animal life so these can be remitted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in justice.

By committing to walk the road of Voice, Treaty and Truth called for by the Uluru Statement from the Heart, to enshrine a First Nations Voice to the occupying parliament, to commit to Makarrata (truth-telling), we establish a new political orthodoxy that admits of the work that must be done both to decolonise and to repair the world.

This struggle is shared across First Nations people of the Pacific Islands, the global South and by those everywhere who are marginalised, dispossessed, oppressed and disadvantaged by prevailing economic and political structures. The peril and privations of climate disruption are felt first and most acutely by those who have contributed least to the problem.

# INTRODUCTION

**IN 2019-20, AFTER YEARS OF DROUGHT EXACERBATED BY CLIMATE CHANGE, MANY COMMUNITIES IN EASTERN AUSTRALIA FELL VICTIM TO BUSHFIRES OF UNPRECEDENTED FEROCITY, AS PREDICTED THE PREVIOUS DECADE BY THE GARNAUT CLIMATE CHANGE REVIEW: “FIRE SEASONS WILL START EARLIER, END SLIGHTLY LATER, AND GENERALLY BE MORE INTENSE. THIS EFFECT INCREASES OVER TIME BUT SHOULD BE DIRECTLY OBSERVABLE BY 2020.” (GARNAUT, 2008, P118)**

2019, two NSW primary schools were lost to those flames albeit mercifully free of injury to students and teachers. Over those harrowing months many other schools and TAFE campuses were damaged or directly threatened. While schoolchildren, in the popular imagination of novels and cartoons, might pucker up and daydream about their school burning down, the grim reality of such occurrence brought only trauma and heartbreak to students, teachers, their families and communities alike.

With the catastrophe still unfolding, Federation condemned the “the failure of the Federal Government to recognise the impact of climate change”, reiterated “its call on all levels of government to acknowledge the research and evidence and demand that they take action to address one of the most critical issues facing our country’s future”, and made immediate provision to promote the Disaster Assistance Fund with affected members (NSW Teachers Federation Council decisions, November 2019).

I recall on the afternoon of 8 November, 2019, returning home from a far-off school visit as a Federation Organiser to congratulate finishing students at my local high school at the conclusion of their final HSC exam in Visual Arts, taught by “Ms Sparks”, Abigail, my wife. Even as these students shared with us their relief and excitement having just completed this major milestone in their lives, a malevolent column of dark smoke billowed on the horizon. That very afternoon, families, including my own, among the community lost dozens of homes to bushfire that devastated the community of Wyaliba, NSW, and its primary school, with two lives lost.

#ClimateStrikes are union business.

One catastrophic burst of many such fires occurred in the days before and after the then-largest global “School Strike 4 Climate” of 20 September, 2019, and led to the loss of homes and lives in northern NSW towns of Tenterfield and Rappville, and including school evacuations to safety.

The year 12 graduating class of 2019 in NSW finished their HSC exams only for many of them to walk literally into a conflagration. For them it was not a summer of “schoolies” and joyful preparations for their next phase of life in a TAFE, university, employment or a “gap year”. It was for many, a summer of terror and peril, not to mention the last pandemic-free months for all of us.

Across that dreadful summer, many NSW teachers were among the more than 62,000 Rural Fire Service volunteers who risked everything against a merciless foe. Over the course of November

# AIMS AND RATIONALE

## THIS STUDY INTENDS TO:

- investigate the means and manner through which young people as climate activists relate their personal world to the practice of collective action and participation, and what terms such as “strike” and related industrial strategies mean to them in this context
- apply an historical perspective to the #ClimateStrike movement in the context of general strikes of the 19th and 20th centuries at the zenith of the global union movement
- consider the potential for a re-emergence of collective action via the union movement as the pre-eminent driver of social and economic justice, in combination with the #ClimateStrike movement at the vanguard of environmental justice.

A working premise of the study will be that “today’s climate activists are tomorrow’s union members”.

The hypothesis to be investigated is that the global #ClimateStrike phenomenon heralds a crucial opportunity to rejuvenate a culture of collective action, participation and union membership among the rising generation of activists.

Focus questions will include:

- What are some key experiences and learnings that young activists have gained through their participation in the #ClimateStrike movement thus far?
- How do young activists relate to the notions of collective action, participation and organisation to achieve their goals?

- Through what strategies could the union movement, in general, and education unions, in particular, ensure they remain visible, viable and prominent in the cause of climate justice for a stable and viable future for working people and the cause of public education?

## Rationale

Like the union movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, the global student climate protest movement (via events colloquially referred to as “climate strikes”) has emerged as a self-organising group of people asserting their rights democratically, in this case their right to a future that includes a stable climate that supports the continuation of advanced human civilisation.

Like those among the union movement of the 19th and 20th centuries, members of the global student

climate protest movement have shown willingness to act, to challenge prevailing economic and political structures, to take risks, and to employ grassroots democratic principles in pursuit of their goals.

Young people face a precarious, uncertain future plagued by climate risk and instability. These conditions will only exacerbate the economic risks and instability that have undermined job security, salaries and working conditions, increased economic inequality, and which have presided over a multi-decade trend of decline in the organised labour movement in Australia (although notably less so in other countries).

This rising generation has demonstrated an intuitive grasp of some traditions and methods of the historical union movement in pursuit of its aims, made evident in its use of the evocative term “climate *strike*”. Like previous generations of student protesters, they face hostility and misunderstanding from the government of the day, from mainstream media, departments of education, and a large swathe of the general public.

# AIMS AND RATIONALE

This situation presents an urgent question to all unions and education unions in particular: Will this rising generation see the union movement of its forebears at its shoulder in its struggle to secure its own future? Or will this generation march forward together into that future, while the union movement remains an historical memory, having had no direct role and played no direct part in the struggle of their generation?



# REVIEW

**THIS REVIEW BEGINS WITH AN ANALYSIS OF SOME THEMES AND DYNAMICS TO BE FOUND IN COMMON ACROSS DIVERSE PROTEST MOVEMENTS, THEN SEEKS TO CONNECT THOSE TO THE CURRENT #CLIMATESTRIKE PHENOMENON, NOTWITHSTANDING THE UNIQUE MILIEU IN WHICH EACH MOVEMENT HAS ARISEN AND CONTINUES TO OPERATE.**

The review concludes with an overview of vectors for union movement renewal that are currently practised among a range of powerful unions internationally, and which are being explored with equal vigour in our Federation.

## The struggle continues, always

Every mass protest movement since industrialisation has emerged in response to a unique set of oppressive circumstances and each movement has endeavoured, often with halting progress and setbacks among more significant victories over the longer run, to disrupt and overturn those vectors of oppression.

The deliberately provocative nature of protest movements can give the impression that they were sudden and decisive in their emergence and effect, but this is rarely if ever so. Most often the historically visible tip of a protest movement sits atop an iceberg that may have formed over decades, coalescing from an ever-growing number of, at first, silent dissidents who collectively find their voice through organisation, mobilisation, resistance and even revolution.

The acknowledged leaders of such movements whose names adorn history are often over-identified as persons of unique qualities and significance, but such “great person” analysis too often leads to the fault of overlooking or even erasing the masses marching at their shoulders and at their backs, the masses who together propelled those famous names into history books.

When we attune to this mode of analysis, we become better equipped to identify the periods when each movement has attained peaks of power, coherence and effect, as well as the more fallow years or decades around those peaks. We also notice that most movements have not one, but multiple such peaks. Such analysis is of urgent importance for the union movement as a whole and not least to Federation, now in its 103rd year.

So, let us pay heed to the quote from Emile de Antonio that began a previous Eric Pearson report, “If we forget history, we are only a convulsive twitch to today’s media output.” (Mulheron, 2014, p5)

We can readily call to mind a succession of protest movements that have between them shaped many features of today’s social order in many countries — a broad and non-exhaustive chronology of which would include the emancipation movement, unions and the labour movements from the 19th to 21st centuries, the suffragettes, second- and third-wave feminists, First Nations movements and in this country the much-unfinished project of justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; post-war decolonisation struggles including our nearest neighbours in Timor-Leste, West Papua, among Indonesia, South-east Asia, and the Pacific; the civil rights and anti-Apartheid movements; the Cold War-era peace movement that encompassed Vietnam War protests and anti-nuclear marches; the global environmental movement; refugee rights; anti-racism; and LGBTIQ rights.

We can likewise identify instances of cross-pollination among and between contemporaneous movements when they found cause to act in solidarity. Two notable examples include:

- those construction unions in Australia that found seemingly unexpected common ground with the nascent 1970s environmental movement in the form of Green Bans, of which the Federation was a first-moving prominent supporter (Burgmann & Burgmann, 2017, pp176-177), and the first education union to do so in the face of trenchant criticism from reactionaries inside and out

## REVIEW

- those same workers' early support for the emergence of what were then known as "Gay Rights", in stopping work to protest the exclusion of a gay university student from an Australian college campus (Hamilton, 2016, p78).

All of these movements continue in various forms to the present day as all of these movements remain unfinished projects despite their respective records of significant progress across generations. Centuries after the commencement of the emancipation movement where our thumbnail chronology started, we see in Black Lives Matter protests since the 2010s the ongoing resistance to state violence and systemic racism against people of colour; we see also the horrors of modern-day slavery continue to this day, and are most heavily inflicted by hyper-capitalism in the global North against people of colour in the global South.

The post-Cold War millennial decades have also seen in the emergence of other movements, the recency of which resists historical analysis in the conventional sense, but which are included here to acknowledge their emerging effect. Such movements broadly comprise post-Marxist anti-capitalist protest in the form of anarchist and anti-globalisation protests from the 1990s, the (currently stalled) Arab Spring, the (dormant? dispersed?) Occupy movement, and the anarchic/libertarian Yellow Vests in Europe. While spokespeople from these movements often claim to be untethered from some of the conventional political axes and agencies with which previous protest movements were aligned, they yet remain in the protest tradition and retain many elements of philosophy and praxis, those being to disrupt and resist an oppressive status quo.

### Only physics is inevitable

In all such analyses, we must not be led astray by the "historical fallacy" (Dewey, 1896, p367), the error of assuming inevitability of outcome based on the preceding processes. This close cousin of the post hoc logical fallacy can make such movements appear to have met with their successes as a necessary and inexorable outcome of their tactics, organisation and the inherent justice of their demands. Nothing could be further from the truth.

While we can draw solace and inspiration from oft-quoted maxims such as Martin Luther-King's "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice", when we subject such poetics to cold analysis we can only admit they are so much magical thinking; as he explicitly acknowledged in the less frequently quoted coda to those remarks. There was and is nothing pre-ordained about the success of any one protest movement, and for every movement that has notched up a record of success there are others that impinge little on the present due to their failure. The Luddites for example were notoriously unsuccessful in their aims, no matter how many mill-wheels they smashed. Likewise, the Arab Spring, Occupy, and the Yellow Vests await the judgement of history.

Jane McAlevey's warning in respect to the Occupy movement is equally applicable to all current struggles including that of climate action:

*"An incorrect power analysis can lead people who want to end capitalism to think that small numbers of demonstrators occupying public spaces like parks and squares and tweeting about it will generate enough power to bring down Wall Street."* (McAlevey, 2016, p62)

Thus, it must be with guarded determination, not complacency, that we face the current crisis. The rightness of one's cause is no guarantee of the fulfilment of its aims. At the opening round of every struggle, the bosses, the state, and entrenched interests hold all the cards; we in the movement hold only each other.

### Striking without a job ...

A multi-disciplinary corpus of field research by language educators, anthropologists and sociolinguists alike has long identified teenagers in general, and young women in particular, as linguistic innovators (Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 2016). Historical sociolinguistics find across many languages and cultures that it is often teenagers, notably young women looking at the world with fresh eyes, who name that which they see in terms that are novel, direct and challenging to the language-bound assumptions of their forebears. Is it really so surprising then that it was a teenage student, a young woman, who in August 2018 set themselves on the steps of their country's parliament house with a sign that read "Skolstrejk för klimatet"?

Notwithstanding a major international climate protest in 2015 organised across some 175 countries involving more than 600,000 participants including strong student and school-age protesters (Phipps et al., 2015), we know that the 2018 #ClimateStrike movement became an "immediate" media sensation that swept the world. Applying our general analysis to protest movements, we see clearly that Greta Thunberg represents the tip of an iceberg (sic) that began to form as early as 2006 in our very own country with the Australian Youth Climate Coalition developing school-based action templates among and between student activists ([aycc.org.au](http://aycc.org.au)).

The bold term #ClimateStrike packs a lot of power into a beguilingly simple yet sophisticated social media-ready label. It has a Janus-like quality as "climate" peers into both past and future, and "strike" also signals clear intent by invoking so many of the previous protest movements mentioned in the thumbnail survey above.

The term #ClimateStrike indicates that the student-led movement grasped intuitively the power of withdrawing one's cooperation be it paid labour in the traditionally exercised practice of a union-led strike, be it the refusal to be conscripted to unjust war, or be it to resist oppressive social norms of patriarchy and capitalism via the housework strikes of second-wave feminism or the shareholder corporate activism and advertiser boycotts of post-Marxist protest.

## REVIEW

And in understanding the power of the concept of a “strike”, the students boldly applied that label to their own actions despite the fact that by conventional (not to mention legal) definition they could not possibly be “striking” in the same terms as the boss-worker, employer-employee paradigm.

As with many a bewildered adult first presented with a teenager’s linguistic challenge, or indeed any teacher confronted by a student’s verbal jousts in the classroom, we might allow those of us in the union movement a few seconds of flat-footed incredulity as our adult brain parses the novel use of previously familiar language.

### ... but not without a union

Unions in general might justifiably have considered themselves to have a sole claim to the term “strike” in the context of organised labour, but many proved willing to support the students’ novel adaptation of the term and began to offer support in a range of forms that progressed from the rhetorical to the institutional and finally to the material in both personnel and resources.

The initial phase of Federation’s response was to offer rhetorical support for the first large #ClimateStrike of 2019, citing the political philosophy of supporting young people’s democratic right to protest and their exercise of free association and speech:

*“The NSW Teachers Federation supports the right of young people to join together to protest about the need for urgent and sustained action on climate change. This is their democratic right.” (Mulheron, 2019)*

With a nod to some short-term tactical necessities this message was somewhat muted among intense preparation for consequential state and federal elections in March and May of that year.

This initial response was followed soon after by a more full-throated message and institutional muscle to accompany the 20 September, 2019, #ClimateStrike:

*“The Global Climate Strike on 20 September is an opportunity to put action on climate change front and centre of the political debate and bring together a united cross-section of our society to protect and defend the environment and work to ensure the viability of future generations in terms of sustainable food and water, health, education, housing and secure employment.” (NSW Teachers Federation Council, 2019, August)*

Federation urged members to choose from a range of practical actions to indicate their support, including organising workplace meetings to consider a recommended motion on climate change addressed to MPs and Senators, and encouraging family and friends to become involved in the campaign led by the student movement. Federation also encouraged teachers to participate in rallies if they were not working that day; and via Unions NSW, officers and staff could volunteer to assist in marshalling and public safety duties at the rallies, in effect to be some “supervising adults” overseeing the safety of students as they went about their extra-curricular excursion.

Coupled with this was an acknowledgement that the union could not and did not presume to speak or act for on behalf of the students. #ClimateStrikes are the students’ movement led by students, and will always remain so:

*“Federation acknowledges that the global student climate protest is a movement generated from the determined activism of students but welcomes the call for adult action and the call to join a union.” (NSW Teachers Federation Council, 2019, August)*

For this reason, the decision stopped short of authorising a stop work by members, and thus navigated a risk that the union would become “the story” when the focus had to remain on the students and their protest. Similarly, teachers had to maintain their legal duty of care to all students and thus the impetus for students to strike would come from parents and carers to write notes to their school stating that a student would be absent for the period of the protest, and this ensured teachers not be put in the invidious position of being either a “blocker” or an “authoriser” of a student’s absence when that right rested with the students themselves via their households.

Then, in the face of the climate crisis made most dreadfully evident by the climate-aggravated drought and bushfire disasters of 2019-20, Federation Council’s first decision of 2020 established a new role of “a Climate Emergency Coordinator ... to advise the Senior Officers on future policies and activities” and for which role a range of research, investigative, liaison and advisory responsibilities were specified to identify “ways in which the union can have a sustained impact on responding to the [climate] emergency” (NSW Teachers Federation Council, 2020, February).

This last response represents the material step of boots on the ground, devoting personnel and resources funded by the members in support of the students’ struggle, shared by all. One notable instance of this strategy has already been deployed in the field by the Hunter Jobs Alliance — of unions, community groups and activists — who have already begun campaigning for a just transition for workers in fossil fuel industries, an initiative of which Federation is a founding member (O’Malley, 2020).

Thus, we reach the critical juncture of this review. Having committed to rhetorical, institutional and material support for the #ClimateStrike movement, Federation has crossed a threshold. It has done so because the cause is just, it is in members’ interests, and the times require it. But returning to our analysis we know that success is not pre-ordained, there are no guarantees, and the future is uncertain.

### So ... ‘What is Federation going to do about it?’

This oft-heard question strikes at the heart of the issue of climate action for our own and many other unions. A previous Eric Pearson Study Grant report lamented the “culture of dependency” that had developed among the membership (Zadkovich, 1999, p21) and which analysis was confirmed in Jane McAlevey’s (2016, Chapter 2) more recent account of building union power: the dependency of members who see the union as a “third party” in their working lives rather than seeing themselves as “union”.

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Iona Byford's (2009) research among young workers in Britain found that a key factor in their decision to join was identity-based, and those who were not members would most commonly cite that "I don't see myself as a union person" (p236-237). It is alarming to note that many of today's teachers who are fee-paying financial members of our union might well express a similar sentiment about their own identity!

For the truth is that the #ClimateStrike movement will continue with or without the union movement at its shoulder. **The question for unionists is whether our movement has a future without #ClimateStrike activists** choosing to join our ranks as they begin their working lives over the years to come. That choice will depend in no small measure on what these young activists experience as they prepare their signs, banners and chants. Will they see, hear, feel, understand and appreciate the involvement of union supporters as they march? Will they look to apply their early experience of collective action in the streets to their later experience of their first pay cheque, their first promotion or their first workplace dispute?

Federation can proffer much from its stocks of knowledge, strength, advocacy, support and unity. These are in abundance across the membership and the institution. Many other unions could make an equivalent offer in proportion to their size and strength. But an honest appraisal of the skills, capacity, flair and ingenuity to be found among the #ClimateStrike movement shows that, to be frank, the students as a collective could also teach us a thing or two.



*"Among campaigning or activist-based organisations there is a need to develop ways of co-ordinating and aligning activist development, campaigning skills and know-how, researching, leadership development, alliance building as well as utilising the range of communication technologies available."*  
(Brown & Yasukawa, 2010, p68)

The #ClimateStrike movement has manifested thousands of local action rallies totalling hundreds of thousands of participants in nigh-on 200 countries on multiple occasions over the past five years and shows no sign of slowing down, pandemic or not. It has done so with but a fraction of the resource base that most unions enjoy from their salaried members; the zeal of youth is a powerful fuel. Yet as with protesters of past generations they only march because they feel they have to, and if it is not an action they relish it is action they believe necessary. Thus, if and when their demands are met many of them will seek to do as did their forebears: fold away those banners, take down their signs, return peacefully to their homes, studies, work and families.

When these activists commence their working lives, what then would be their reasons to seek out the union representative at their workplace? Will they carry with them the solidarity from unionists who supported their cause, in whatever form a "union card" takes this century? And are members of today much prepared to concern themselves with the struggle of these future workers? If we are smart, the answer must be that we stand with them, shoulder to shoulder.

# METHODOLOGY

**IT BEHOVES A COLLECTIVE ORGANISATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH COLLECTIVELY, AND THIS IS HOW THE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH FORUMS WERE DESIGNED. IN CONTRAST TO A CONVENTIONAL SET OF INDIVIDUAL SURVEYS OR INTERVIEWS, THE RESEARCHER DEVISED A MEANS FOR STUDENT CLIMATE ACTIVISTS TO WORK TOWARDS A SET OF COLLECTIVE STATEMENTS IN RESPONSE TO STIMULUS QUOTES DERIVED FROM PROTEST MOVEMENTS OF OTHER TIMES AND PLACES, AT A LIVE FORUM ENTITLED “SUSTAINING OUR UNITY”.**

Participants at the forum were challenged to focus on the position of “we”, more so than the position of “me”. This was a deliberate strategy of skill-building among participants who were all capable students in their own right and who had no difficulty with articulating and giving expression to their individual views. All had direct experience participating in or even, in many cases, organising and leading school strike actions of their own. But building solidarity requires taking the extra step, the extra work, of coming to an intersubjective understanding of a position that encompasses the voices and experiences of all in the room and more broadly, in the movement. Many together lift more than one alone.

In a pre-COVID world, the pedagogy of the forum would look familiar to many teachers and researchers: groups of students around a table, compiling sets of shared ideas on butcher’s paper for further refinement, discussion and eventual agreement. While there was a pandemic-induced technological overlay to all this, in that students were working remotely via videoconference breakout rooms, shared screens, online collaborative documents, chat and email, the pedagogical process and dynamics were unchanged.

Each group had a facilitator whose role was to maintain a safe space for all, to encourage contributions from all (in whatever manner they were most comfortable to contribute), and to be open to any and all responses from the group in whatever form those responses took. While no group decided in this instance to devise a spoken-word poem or interpretive dance, there was nothing in the research design to forestall or prevent this from arising had students chosen such a path.

What emerged from this process is a series of text-based statements that the researcher subjected to interpretive analysis applying the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1997). This is a suite of qualitative techniques that give insight into the phenomenological basis of human behaviour by providing insights into people’s “lifeworld”. This method was recommended because of its potential to transcend the limitations encountered by theory-based models when attempting to deal with the ephemeral nature of many activists’ experiences.

*“Phenomenological analysis is a process of reading, reflection, and writing and rewriting that enables the researcher to transform the lived experience into a textual expression of its essence.” (van Manen, 1990, p10)*

The process by which this method attains its rigour is through the labour of intersubjective cognitive effort, a sensitive, empathic analysis of qualitative data, culminating in a statement that captures the unique qualia that distinguish the experience under study from any other. This method enables the observer to, as it were, walk a mile in the shoes of another. Such effort is necessary and worthwhile as it can produce a particular response, an “ah ha!” of recognition from the reader, based on a shared phenomenological understanding that transcends the particular circumstances of subject, reader and researcher.

Educator-researchers in the field of phenomenology have described this approach in the following terms:

*“Understanding the viewpoints of the insiders within a particular social setting.”*

*“The belief that our worlds are independent, messy, unique and therefore the qualitative research aims to understand this complexity rather than to uncover a ‘knowable truth.’” (Kervin et al., 2006).*

*“Understanding and interpretation are intertwined, and interpretation is an evolving process.” (Richards & Morse, 2007, p49)*

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*“Plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world.”*

*“The research questions are not predetermined, rather, the research follows the cues of the participant and the conversation proceeds thoughtfully.” (van Manen, 1997, p170)*

To the extent that such a recognition of “lifeworlds”, an affinity and shared ability to see the “other”, is necessary to gain acceptance, understanding and action, it is an essential pursuit for the future of union activism, recruitment and, as such, no less related to the cause of climate action.

Features of the analysis included:

### Forum design — intent for in-person forum adjusted by pandemic

The initial study proposal involved expending the Eric Pearson Study Grant to host an in-person forum at Teachers Federation House, inviting student activists from Australia and Pacific Islands nations to work with facilitators in small-group discussion to prepare shared statements.

As the pandemic prevented such arrangements, the forum was reconceived as a Zoom-hosted mediated discussion between student activists in small groups with their facilitators, with a research stipend payable directly to students. The process proved to be a sound analogue of an in-person forum, and the online format was productive and interactive for all involved.

Feedback from the experience of students and facilitators is included in the Appendix and indicates a high level of satisfaction with and confidence in the conduct of the forums.

### Invitations for expressions of interest and First Nations forum

The researcher selected participants on the basis of their response to an open call for expressions of interest promoted in climate activist networks during early 2020. The application form is in the Appendix and resulted in dozens of sound and rigorous applications from interested participants. All participants who completed the expression of interest were invited by the researcher to take part in the forum, and all accepted the invitation, with some late apologies ahead of the forum as a few accepted applicants changed their plans just before.

The first forum was an open invitation to all student climate activists, including First Nations participants. The second forum was reserved for First Nations participants only and was attended by a contingent of students from the University of the South Pacific PACE-SD institute (Pacific Centre for Sustainable Development), which falls under the university’s climate change research program. This second forum included First Nations activists from Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Tuvalu.

The researcher made several invitations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student activists via representative networks including SEED, the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and

the union outreach organisation Tipping Point. First Nations activists in Australia declined to apply and this prompted concern and reflection by the researcher. In a year when the colonial nation allowed the blasting of 46,000-year old Juukan Caves cultural sites by Rio Tinto, the NSW Government approved fracking of Gomerol land, when the Victorian Government felled 800-year old Djab Wurrung birthing trees, and the Commonwealth Government withheld from committing to the aims of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (First Nations National Constitutional Convention, 2017), it should come as little surprise that First Nations activists in this country might choose to avoid participating in projects overseen by a non-Indigenous researcher. It is a lesson that colonial workers in this space must earn the participation and trust of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in shared enterprises, and that it is the prerogative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activists to set the terms by which they choose to participate.

First Nations voices from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander climate activists are included in the Additional Data section of the report, drawing on statements these activists made with regard to their own custodianship of the land, and non-Indigenous allyship, in public forums hosted by the School Strike 4 Climate movement during 2020.

### Participant characteristics

Participants were able to freely describe their gender on their application and in aggregate 65 per cent self-described as women to 35 per cent men. Among the activists from Australia, 82 per cent self-described as women.

Most participants were enrolled at a university, including all the Pacific Islander activists. Among the Australian-based activists, 18 per cent were school aged (non-NSW students) who participated with the permission of a parent/carer.

The aggregate characteristics of participants from information volunteered in their expressions of interest included:

- First Nations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) – 0 per cent (see preceding section)
- First Nations (Pacific Islands) – 53 per cent
- living with a disability – 11 per cent
- rural/regional background – 46 per cent
- culturally and linguistically diverse background – majority
- background of socioeconomic disadvantage – 15 per cent
- LGBTIQ+ — 23 per cent
- 19 per cent of participants chose “prefer not to say” with respect to characteristics in this list.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participant information statement

The Participation Information Statement (see Appendix) sets out the structure of the forums, the guarantee of confidentiality for participants and the research stipend payable to them from the Eric Pearson Study Grant.

Following precepts of ethical research practice, none of the participants in this study were students enrolled in a NSW school. The invitation was extended in the first instances to applicants aged over 18 years at the time of the forum with a view to inviting school age participants via the NSW Office of the Children's Advocate. As the pandemic disrupted the usual operations of that agency also, a couple of applications from school-age children were accepted by the researcher upon receipt of written permission from a parent/carer. The researcher and facilitators each held a current Working With Children Check, all participants took part remotely and no part of the forum was recorded in any form other than what the participants themselves submitted in their text responses.

### Introductory session

The forum began with a 45-minute seminar conducted by the researcher to outline the aims, process and expectations for the day. Students were introduced to their facilitators, help points and escalation contact points were provided to students, and an overview of the day's proceedings were set out.

Students and their facilitators then spent the remainder of the forum in Zoom breakout rooms together examining the stimulus quotes in eight parts and preparing their collective responses. The researcher remained available to them throughout the day via the forum lobby.

### Facilitated, mediated discussion

The aim set for the facilitated groups was to devise collective responses to the set of stimulus quotes, presented in eight parts under thematic headings. All groups were presented with the same materials, which were discussed in the same order. The discussion periods were 90 minutes in an introductory session, followed by a two-hour break for offline individual reflection and lunch, then a 90-minute concluding session to finalise the collective statements.

The researcher did not directly participate in focus groups but rather facilitators were briefed on the methodology and background of the stimulus quotes. Facilitators were briefed that the ability of groups to respond in their own terms and in their own voice was paramount.

As participants were, generally speaking, all high-achieving students and many with leadership experience in coordinating or hosting climate activist events themselves, the extra level of challenge set for students was to arrive at collective rather than individual statements.

The researcher's deliberately aloof position from the small-group interactions was intended to maintain non-interference on the researcher's part

as to what participants might say, and instead to analyse only the textual responses that emerged. The researcher engaged in a post-forum debrief with the facilitators in order to test the validity of the researcher's impressions of the students' collective statements.

### Sequence of questions

The stimulus quotes are reproduced in the Data section and Appendix, along with some guidance/reflection questions to be offered by the facilitators as group discussion ensued. The themes were:

- Being in the movement
- Finding supporters
- Dealing with trolls
- Ethical disobedience
- The courage of disobedience
- School's out?
- Involvement with unions.

### Feedback after the sessions

Participants were offered a feedback survey at the end of the day's proceedings, which delivered the following results:

The following percentage of respondents "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with these statements:

**100 per cent** "The application documents for the forum (online form and participant information statement) were suitable for me to use to apply for the forum."

**100 per cent** "The forum purpose and my role were clearly explained to me during the 'overview session'."

**100 per cent** "The roles of other people present at the forum were clearly explained to me during the 'overview session'."

**100 per cent** "The quotes presented to my group felt meaningful and relevant to my experiences as a climate activist."

**100 per cent** "I think our group was appropriately supported by the facilitator during small-group discussions."

**100 per cent** "Overall, I think the forum was a worthwhile use of my time on the day."

**94 per cent** "In my group, I think there was a good general level of shared participation, contribution and cooperation among my fellow activists (6 per cent neutral, 0 disagree)."

**94 per cent** "Much of the time, my group were readily able to arrive at a shared statement, or otherwise to be clear about reasons why a shared statement was difficult to arrive at (6 per cent disagree)."

**94 per cent** "I felt clear about how I could access assistance during the forum if the need arose (6 per cent disagree)."

**84 per cent** "The online tools available to us as a small group on the day were suitable for us to prepare shared statements in response to the quotes (11 per cent neutral, 5 per cent disagree)."

## METHODOLOGY

As one participant shared at the conclusion of the forum:

*“It is a personal joy for me to be part of this event. This has tested my knowledge regarding the issue of climate change and the requirements needed to fight climate change. It has brought to my attention the information gap between past researchers and current, and the need to foster networks, to create partnerships, and [for] unions [to] directly look into the topic of climate change.”*

Based on this feedback, the researcher offers the data generated by this study as a sound empirical sample with which to undertake analysis for a hermeneutic phenomenological study.

The data can be regarded as valid and reliable due to the methodical and consistent means by which it was generated. Whether it is generalisable is something of a moot point having regard to the nature of qualitative research, however, the recommendations that emerge from the data analysis and discussion can be tested in the real world through the manner in which Federation and the union movement more broadly may take up those recommendations.



# DATA

## GROUP RESPONSES TO QUOTES

The following quotes from the student activist groups' responses are most helpful to illuminate the themes explored by this study.

The stimulus quotes are reproduced below, with highlights from group responses following:

### Being in the movement

#### Stimulus quotes:

*"For many of the young people caught up in those heady times, the protests defined us. We felt we were making the world a better place, and we were. Although a few moved into politics and non-government organisations, most went on to careers, families and mortgages ... Since then, new generations of activists have grown up and discovered the personal fulfilment that comes from committing, if only for a time, to a cause beyond oneself."*

– Social activist: 20th Century (Hamilton, 2016, viii)

*"It was like an ocean ... There was a feeling that an enormous mass of human beings had united for a common purpose and that purpose electrified the air. There was a feeling that the people had taken over ... There was a feeling that this is our city, it belongs to us. It belongs to the ordinary people. I had never seen that before, and those who did not participate missed something in their lives."*

– Peace activist: 20th Century (Hamilton, 2016, p26)

#### Responses:

"A generation of young people now see themselves as activists."

"Protests change people, change their impressions of themselves that can push them forward in other protests fighting for future generations."

"It's something that really sticks with you, you still think about those moments and I think it really changes you as well."

"People can get inspired and be convinced over time — this is visible in the growth of movements."

"All these movements defined the generation, but our behaviour defines us too."

"We don't think it's selfish to protest, it's actually an incredibly selfless act of solidarity."

"[There's] lots of talk about how people feel isolated and alienated now, constantly stuck on their phones, but activism cuts against this; young people [are] still just as willing to organise protests."

"The climate justice movement is so inclusive. Like any movement there are problems, but on the whole those who identify with any sexuality, gender, race ability etc are accepted in this movement. Activism brings us together. We are all striving for the cause. It truly is an otherworldly feeling of joy, connectedness, [fulfilment], motivation and community."

"People in the movement oppose all types of oppression and support all different oppressed groups."

"[We are] learning about the power and creativity of ordinary people."

"[We] make decisions collectively, learn through debates and discussions."

"This has to be done collectively because only then will it have a purpose and become more organised and sustained."

"Democracy in movements is often messy."

"[We] can contribute to something broader than [ourselves]."

### Finding supporters

#### Stimulus quote:

*"I think community opinion was pretty split down the middle. Talkback callers were almost universally against us and most op-ed pieces were running the line that we'd been hugely irresponsible ... We were copping it from the police, the media and our own bosses. It wasn't until a few days later when I got on to the bus to go to work and all the passengers suddenly broke out into applause that I realised some people were on our side."*

– Activist protesting against APEC forum, Sydney 2007 (McIntyre, 2013, p254)

#### Responses:

"Our group has experienced their fair share of small 'applauses' whether it be in a physical setting or online through social media. We feel that finding supporters is a key part to protesting because it's good to know that someone out there actually cares and feels the same way that we do. We also believe that taking that leap to gain more supporters has been made much easier by social media. It provided us with a 'shield' whereby we can gain allies."

## DATA

“[Social media] seems to be a useful tool to gauge support, however, protests are a great way to see the material support a movement has. Additionally, politics that support ordinary people against the rich and [reactionary] politicians are good ways to create support.”

“Being put in a more conservative environment can be daunting but having an activists’ space to go back to can be quite helpful in dealing with the more regressive environments.”  
 “You can create a strong activist network even in the most conservative of places.”  
 “Education can play an important role in helping people to engage more with these issues.”

“Older activists contribute to teaching younger people the lessons learned through their movements, how to organise and fight in ways that are informed by the struggles of the past.”  
 “Youths drive the support for activism in [country]. The older generation work behind the scenes passing down advice and past knowledge on certain issues.”  
 “Having more experienced activists help guide younger activists can be very comforting.”  
 “There are others that might give secret support — silent supporters in education/work environments.”

“Virtual activism has played a greater role compared to the local activism as there is more space and opportunity to speak your heart.  
 “[We think that] the current generation has more information and results to make a better decision as compared to those in the past.”  
 “Our group which has different backgrounds came together [as] a great support system.”  
 “Collaborating with other stakeholders would

enable us to achieve our climate action targets without problems if we were to accept each other. Goals and objectives are achieved if people have a common purpose.”

“Movements responding in emotional ways can provoke empathy from others.”  
 “Teaching empathy as well, [teaching about] issues that affect all different groups.”  
 “There have been positive responses from communities [where] we have been invited to do presentations. This has enabled us to improve our methods of conducting presentations in order to share the right information with communities.”

### Dealing with trolls

#### Stimulus quote:

*“One man spat at my feet and a woman actually spat on me ... It was as if we had unleashed a strange loathing bottled up inside them.”*

– Peace activist and Vietnam War protester  
 (Hamilton, 2016, p8)

*“The Nazis were very active. They threw a brick through my window and wrote ‘Red Rat’ over my house, which we later changed to ‘Fred Rat’ because it sounded more friendly.”*

– Anti-Apartheid activist  
 (McIntyre, 2013, p224)

#### Responses:

“When young people want to change things, people can be scared of that. People in power will push against [us].”  
 “I live in a very conservative area [so] it takes a lot of bravery to go to a protest and we did get quite a lot of people there and we did get a lot of hecklers and it takes a lot to go against the status quo.”  
 “Never take it to heart – [the] complaints are very stupid.”  
 “Monitor our inner critic – our minds naturally think about negative things.”  
 “[Trolls are] more likely to attack online, [reflecting a] lack of effort.”

“People have so much vitriol for activist issues. Ignorance makes them have this belief.”  
 “[We] can help people learn – [it is] easier to help people learn by telling them things rather than insulting them.”  
 “A lot of people follow the norm and it can be possible to change their perspective.”

“The media tends to villainise protests and paint them in a negative light. However, this isn’t a reflection on people’s true beliefs. There is always more support than what is portrayed.”  
 “Regular individuals don’t have the influence that the media has, which means that our perspective is typically not represented.”  
 “Negative media can push people away, but also make people more interested.”

“[There is] often negative media about protests, no matter how tame or respectable they are, because they are a challenge to the powerful.”  
 “People of colour can come under heavier attack from the media, others need to stand with them.”

“We experience attacks by random people ... but the police are a far bigger threat. They have far more power than random people on the streets. Police can enact violence upon us legally, and they’re often physically violent at protests.”  
 “Police have a history of strip-searching under-age women as well; [they] are in a position of immoral power that they can use against [protesters].”  
 “Police racism is significant as well.”

“People are far more willing to attack activists online. For example, [organisation] was hacked by someone who signed the account up to porn websites. People constantly attack [organisation] online for taking a stand for Aboriginal rights. It’s far easier to attack people online, and there are much more limited consequences.”  
 “Networks are also created when climate activists attend training, seminars and workshops or when they visit villages and communities. Government and non-government officials provide assistance during this meet-up for specific assistance in relation to creating a network in order to increase the awareness of climate change and carrying out activities to slow the impacts of climate change.”

## DATA

### Ethical disobedience

#### Stimulus quote:

*“We mustn’t be frightened to educate others and fight, but not in a war-like way, to protect the earth and let everything run free. I don’t want to shoot or bomb the people from [company] and the others who are destroying the country because two wrongs don’t make a right. I think if I can help them to wake up to what they are doing then that will be punishment enough.”*

– Aboriginal Land Rights, environmental and anti-nuclear activist (McIntyre, 2013, p273)

#### Responses:

“The more people that engage in disobedience, the more difficult it is for there to be consequences.”

“The bigger our movements are, the less confident our opponents will be.”

“The Nazis and apartheid are things that required strong political opposition.”

“The racists who tried to stop [ethnicity] people from going onto beaches [and who] didn’t want refugees to gather in public, they were kicked off the streets of [city] by large protests and social pressure, calling them racists whenever they were seen in public.”

“There’s no coming to a nice middle ground against people who support the police brutalising protesters.”

“Peace ethic is a vital component in any protest and campaigns, and it is very important to be carried out all throughout the protest most especially when dealing with trolls and authorities.”

“Violence isn’t just hostility or disobedience. [It is] wrong to describe people shouting at the police as ‘violence’. For example, police [are] institutionally violent towards Aboriginal people, [so] it’s not violence for Indigenous protesters to chant ‘fuck the police’ at a rally.”

“Violence by the oppressed is self-defence.”

“You can’t morally convince those in power, those who control and own the coal mines, the nuclear power plants etc. to stop for the sake of the environment. Their own interests [lie] in maintaining profits as capitalists [and this] means we need to force change.”

“Corporations won’t be convinced by morality, only by money.”

### The courage of disobedience

#### Stimulus quote:

*“I’m a terrible chicken myself, but the other people were bold and brave, and we egged each other on.”*

– Life-long social and cultural activist, artist and feminist (McIntyre, 2013, p276)

*“Self-proclaimed welfare queens, poets and rappers, old and young, rolled in wheelchairs, walked with walkers, rode in buses or ran with breathless abandon, carrying signs and banners, dancing to music and speeches, marching to whatever drummer they chose.”*

– Poems from the Occupy movement (Annsfire, 2013)

#### Responses:

“In organising meetings parents said, ‘We think our kids will be scared of occupying intersections’, but the kids said, ‘We want to; this issue is important and we need to be disruptive.’”

“Engaging in disobedience can be quite liberating.”

“We should be focusing on what we can gain from activism, rather than what we can lose.”

“The activism approach in [country] is usually supported but is held back due to political barriers. For example, 16 days of activism marches are prohibited unless there are permits allowed.”

“In [country] we can’t organise open protests but instead we need to get a permit with a clear indication of the purpose of the protest.”

“The courage I’ve gained so far is passed down from my mother.”

“In [our culture] the [women] are expected to ‘know their place’ and not speak out much.”

“In [country] we have a culture of respect first, no disobedience, no disrespect. Being disobedient is discouraged.”

“Being more respectable doesn’t mean that you stop getting attacked, and so we shouldn’t moderate ourselves to avoid looking bad.”

“There’s a sense of allyship in protesting.”

“A coordinator took her Indigenous grandchild to climate protest and the number of Indigenous groups there was affirming for her.”

“As a person of colour, knowing the police are disproportionately violent towards people of colour – part of [activist’s] courage comes from knowing that white people will stand with her against that.”

“First Nations people are affected so much more than I will be [so I] use my privilege to stand in solidarity.”

“If you want to be an activist and make change, do it yourself – authorities don’t have your interest at heart.”

“If you tell me not to do something that makes me want to do it.”

“Courage to disobey comes from seeing that, globally, other people want the same thing.”

“With enough people, police have no hope. Police only have power when you’re alone.”

### School’s out?

#### Stimulus quote:

*“My friend’s daughter comes home angry from high school many days. She goes to a well-funded public school, she does well, takes honors classes, gets A and Bs and is on sports teams and clubs. But she knows our schools were designed in the industrial era. Our school systems were designed, not only before social networking, but before Einstein and his theories of relativity and uncertainty principles. It’s a new game. She knows it. Do we?”*

– Occupy Wall Street activist (Jobin-Leeds, 2012)

#### Responses:

“It’s been very mixed — there is lots of condescension ‘you’re a kid trying to change the world.’”

“If you are a school student and you’re going out there to protest to change the world, and your daily life experience is being belittled in school, if you’re able to leave school and have autonomy and see that you can make change, you can go back to school and have a better perception of your power and that you can change things. It opens up your mind to society in general and how to change things.”

## DATA

“Our teachers are encouraged not to support the climate strikes, but many of them do and end up supporting or attending secretly.”

“Schools say students have to put other [non-strike] reasons on the forms about why they are not at school e.g. had an appointment.”

“We are not allowed to send [protest] notices to school lists.”

“Strikes aren’t actually against school, [they are] against the government’s climate policy.”

“All of the teachers were supportive. Teachers and school boards went along. Big schools make headlines by organising for students to go along.”

“Teachers were asked not to join in or support movements. Principals enforced it. Teachers [were] under pressure not to. Teachers [were] at risk of losing jobs.”

“Public schools had posters, teaching it in the curriculum, in science and English. Teachers aren’t meant to say anything as government schools are meant to be unpolitical and unreligious.”

“[We] had to get a leave slip and lie about where the students were going to walk out of school. Admin made them come up with an excuse for walking out so they could register them to leave.”

“Punishment for truancy is detention but for attending the climate strike it was suspension. The only way the kid got away with it was that the paper was contacted and media involvement prevented kids getting in trouble.”

“The university has ties to fossil fuel companies [and so] refused to give people exemptions from tutorials.”

“[We] can’t promote anything – not allowed to send out an email to register – [the] environmental team will put up posters that get taken down.”

“[It’s] clear where [the university’s] interest lie – support the coal industry – uni moved a conference away because students threatened to blockade it.”

“You fail a class if you protest instead of going to an exam.”

“University should engage conversation and promote an environment where students are free to voice their opinions and outrage.”

“The [university] interacts with high school students in spreading the awareness of climate change ... it is a struggle to implement these ideas into the curriculum.”

“Universities are similar to schools in that they promote freedom of thought but then are not strong advocates for protesting.”

“Silencing political discussion isn’t fair. It’s a key part of democracy. At what point does it become censorship?”

“Decisions made about the climate are political decisions. For example, coal companies get enormous government subsidies, which are not granted to renewables, or to public school funding.”

“The climate is also a political issue because of how it affects different oppressed groups, for example for First Nations people it means being removed from their own land. It also affects different classes differently. For working class and poor people, it’s inescapable. For the elite like Scott Morrison they can move into another large house if theirs is threatened by fires. How long would Gina Reinhart have sat on a beach in a burning town?”

## Involvement with unions

## Stimulus quotes:

*“The trade union movement put bans on and wouldn’t transport the [South African rugby team] around ... They also put bans on supplies and the like to the hotels where the players were staying. They actually made the hotel go broke in Sydney.”*

– Anti-Apartheid activist (McIntyre, 2013, p223)

*“To our surprise, the [workers] on the job had no hesitation in deciding to go out on strike ... The union’s intervention put the university under intense pressure and it soon capitulated.”*

– Union leader whose 1970s blue-collar and predominantly heterosexual workers took strike action in support of a gay student who the university was excluding from college (Hamilton, 2016, p78)

## Responses:

“The concrete form of this is work done to talk to unionists and convince layers of society to galvanise together.”

“Must be able to relate to and bring in workers in order to create meaningful change.”

“[The] anti-nuclear movement was so amazing with the workers just refusing to build mines, ship uranium, unload it etc.”

“Unions are as strong as they want to be, but bureaucrats tend to not want to organise recruitment drives, strikes, etc.”

“Workers have potential, because the society is capitalist, so the workers create all the wealth in society, meaning they have the potential to stop society and change it in their image.”

“The failure of communities to recognise the injustice present within their communities is a reason why unions are formed.”

“The bigger the involvement of unions would result in the effectiveness of injustices being solved.”

“Unions would enable issues to be highlighted at a faster pace without delay.”

“Environment and climate are not prioritised within their current existing unions.”

“[We think] it’s best to have a specific union focus only on climate change issues. This would lessen problems and time.”

“Registered unions have limited powers to engage in any formal action especially with regards to climate change. [Some are] only concerned with salaries, increments and their concerns.”

“Some unions are not effective in carrying out their role against climate.”

“Having collective student institutions like student unions and also teachers unions with real strength has helped in history to be able to politically organise and not be stopped.”

“Workers don’t have the same beliefs as their bosses. It’s the working class that has led every progressive movement almost ever.”

## DATA

### Additional data

The researcher also attended a series of public webinars and livestreams hosted by the School Strike 4 Climate movement at which the following statements were made:

#### School Strike 4 Climate Livestream, 15 May, 2020

“The [bushfires and drought] crises have shown we have big problems in Australia and around the world that were apparent before the pandemic. We have a society and economy that were not working for people and not working for the planet.”

– ACTU President Michele O’Neil

#### School Strike 4 Climate Webinar, 13 August, 2020

##### First Nations activist presenters DC and ES

“It comes back to our obligations as custodians of land, water and sky. Climate Change is the result of continued colonisation, a system that has that has allowed the reckless exploitation of Country, which we continue to fight to protect. The outcome needs to be about tipping the balance of power in favour of First Nations Communities, and the ability to decide what’s best for our communities.”

– DC

“We have lived sustainably and in harmony with our lands since time immemorial. We know that a harm to our Country is a harm to us. So, for us it’s about the protection of what’s sacred. Actions of allies need to elevate the work of First Nations activists.”

– ES

#### SEED Indigenous Youth Environmental Activists (seedmob.org.au)

On allyship: “Non-Indigenous allies need to show up and walk with us on the journey. It’s about standing up for what is right, and what is right is climate justice that protects First Nations from the impacts, because First Nations are the worst affected. [Non-Indigenous allies] need to respect us, listen to us, listen to our Elders, don’t talk for us but walk with and support us on the journey. It’s important that Indigenous people do lead the way and non-Indigenous people provide the platform and support, and that allows us to all move forward to guarantee the health of our society.”

#### Pacific Climate Warriors on ‘Decolonising the mind’

“The pandemic gives us a reality check of how quickly things can change, and that’s the reality of climate change.”

– MK, Tonga

#### In conversation with Bob Peterson, Rethinking Schools, interview, 22 October, 2020

The researcher is indebted to Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos for making an introduction to one of the founders of the US-based Rethinking Schools movement, which has fostered union outreach to school students for the purposes of civic education, civil rights promotion, environmental education, collective and grassroots democratic action.

##### Organising future union members

In interview, Bob Peterson offered these thoughts on the following themes:

“Education unions have a special role to play in that we’re teaching students to be prepared for their future, that means that we [include] racial and social justice into all aspects of our curriculum in a developmentally appropriate way, and so engender that activism. It takes civic courage — we need to act as though we live in a democracy.”

“I’m a strong believer in student organising, it began for me in the Vietnam War and civil rights movement [while in high school].”

“[As a union president I had our union assist] a student group called ‘Youth in Power for the Struggle’ ... [Students] got the union to sponsor funds to that group. The Union Local funnelled money to that Organiser. The union has continued to support student organising across the decades.”

“The Rethinking Schools movement has arranged [school district governance structures, district/ regional school boards] in such a way to make these things possible.”

“There’s been a lot of positive interplay at the district level and to some extent the state, but I haven’t seen that on a national level.”

“Students came up with a ‘Student Bill of Rights’ [among which was that] students have the right to be taught by teachers who have the right to collectively bargain.”

##### Climate action plans

“If you’re not experienced, you can pass all sorts of resolutions but without a concrete plan to implement it, it doesn’t mean anything ... that’s why resolutions include the concrete plan.”

“Rethinking Schools sponsored development of a local climate activist organising kit ‘for your school’, for parents, community members and students to use to promote climate activism in their school community. Rethinking Schools then followed up to ask what they’d done arising from the kit ... what concrete actions took place ... response was positive enough to continue sponsoring production and distribution of the kit.”

“The Milwaukee school board [climate action] motion was debated among the union in the presence of students.”

“The union office is a one-storey building with a basement. The room [in which we met with students] was full of posters of previous campaigns e.g. against privatisation of schools. Teachers would bring a student from their school who they knew was a school leader. Teachers would share their stories e.g. their child was so frightened after reading about climate change and so the teacher/parent thought ‘I have to do something’.”

## DATA

“When the Portland resolution was first put forth, one of the things it said is that in future all textbooks purchased by the district need to affirm that climate change is caused by human activity. Media response (Fox) is that the district was censoring books.”

“There are ways for the union movement to make mistakes, to be too much of a big brother telling them how to do things.”

#### #ClimateStrikes

“Logistical support is valuable – getting a good PA at a rally, marshalling and safety.”

“[US teacher unions] obtained agreement to bus students to #ClimateStrike in yellow buses ... to defend the right of students to organise, to protest, to speak up.”

On the issue of students being counted as absent when striking: “One of the purposes of teaching is to engender civic engagement ... one way of doing so is not to punish students taking that initiative.”

“A student, a school board member, the principal, a union rep – [came to] an agreement with the school that the students wouldn’t be penalised for missing a day due to a climate strike.”

“[Because the educational authorities tie school funding to attendance rates] the superintendent would ‘have a heart attack’. Students agreed they would stay to be counted for attendance to ensure funding would continue, then would leave [for the #ClimateStrike].”



# DISCUSSION

**THE RESPONSES OF ACTIVISTS DEMONSTRATE DEEP WELLS OF REFLECTIVE AWARENESS, EMPATHY, INCLUSIVENESS, A COLLECTIVIST ORIENTATION, REALISM, RESOLVE, DETERMINATION, COURAGE, AND A PALPABLE SENSE OF CONCERN AND CLEAR-EYED ALARM FOR WHAT THEIR FUTURE MAY HOLD.**

Subjecting the textual response of groups to “thematic analysis” (van Manen, 1997), the following emerged:

## **Convergence of experiences with earlier protest movements**

The student climate activists of 2020 speak of many concerns that would be familiar to those of earlier protest movements: pressure from police; hostility from defenders of the economic status quo; indifference from political leaders and media outlets; social pressure to desist from family-based and religious sources; and cultural barriers to “speaking out” that are gendered and age based.

Their capacity to navigate this hostile landscape rested on their ability to act in novel ways unanticipated by agents of the status quo: the embrace of online and digital organising networks to find allies, to conduct asymmetric actions when mainstream paths were blocked by authorities demanding permits to protest and such-like.

Where the students expressed they felt at a loss to respond was in practical know-how around the method and manner of organising and staging large events, and the tactics of “creative disruption” at the campus level that have the potential to out-manoeuvre the lumbering apparatus of the state.

## **Commitment to collectivism over individualism (global problem, global response)**

These young activists demonstrated a clear collectivist intent and preference in their deliberations. They didn’t seek to elevate a personality-driven “leader” but rather to ensure their actions were taken as a group, for the group, by the group. While traditional media reports protest movements through the lens of “great persons” as pivotal, that is not evident in the discussions among these activists. Far from elevating a leader to be followed, they simply recount the need for the shared struggle to overcome a shared problem. In their movement, there are no heroes, no media darlings, little if any room for egos; just the present urgency of saving for themselves, and the world, a viable future.

Responses also showed an awareness of the need for full inclusiveness among the movement in terms of age, (dis)ability, gender and sexuality, and for the needs and interests of First Nations to be prioritised.

## **Capacity for intergenerational partnership**

These activists mention many things that can and should be provided to them by the experienced activists of earlier movements. They are receptive to assistance of a practical, logistical, tactical and concrete nature, but for the movement to remain theirs and not be subject to “takeover” by members of those earlier generations and orders who have collectively wrought the current crises.

Among engaged student activists and leaders there is some awareness and understanding of the role of the union movement in past and current struggles, however, this can in no way be regarded as typical or representative of the entire age cohort. The shared stance if anything is somewhat neutral, albeit open to engagement, and it must be remembered that the lived experience of participants so far is that as pre-workers, few if any have had direct experience of unions per se.

## DISCUSSION

### An emerging mass movement, comprised of and led by women

This report bears witness to the emergence of a collective, self-organising mass movement that would be better enabled by the union movement lending moral, institutional, material and logistical support, and from which we could hope to see arise a new generation of workers with fresh experiences and insights about the power of union.

It is also inescapable to note the overwhelming prevalence of research participants in the study were young women who in most, if not all, cases had already engaged in organising, leading, speaking at and/or facilitating climate action events in their respective communities and contexts. A socially just and non-patriarchal society is one in which the emerging face of both the environmental and union movements from the grassroots to leadership level will be that of women and non-cis men.

### And so ...

How might we as teacher-unionists best act in this moment?

While this lone study cannot and does not deliver the “keys to the kingdom”, it can and does present a useful view through the keyhole; an authentic account of the experiences of young activists embarking on their adult lives at a time of great peril for themselves and the world, and who have spoken clearly and vividly of their concerns, aims, interests, hopes and fears at this time.

Thus, from here the discussion ventures into both practical and theoretical realms. Given the urgency of the problem it is appropriate to first discuss the practical, but the report will conclude with a theoretical coda that aims to unify the divergent arms of protest traditions and movements, and thus offers a pathway to resolve ongoing decades of tensions that self-proclaimed “progressive” unions have navigated as they pursue aims that diverge from “traditional” pursuits of salaries and conditions.

Followers of history will be aware of such debates among the Federation membership from the 1950s onwards, as for decades the union membership voted for a series of progressive campaigns and positions in the face of debates among some members who saw such campaigns as extraneous to their view of what the union’s concerns ought to be.

### Practical recommendations

Strictly speaking it goes beyond the scope of this study to propose a laundry list of recommendations, nor is it an appropriate decision-making process to issue as if by fiat a to-do list of items to which the union ought to devote members’ resources.

Rather, this study meets its aims in the presentation of robust, reliable data upon which the union membership may now collectively reflect and devise appropriate field strategies through the democratic decision-making bodies of the union, to be implemented by Federation officers.

As a matter of “grand strategy”, the times call for coalition, the case for which is put by Amanda Tattersall (2010) as follows:

- i. *“Coalitions are most successful when they achieve social change while operating in a way that builds organisational strength for their participating organisations.”*
- ii. *“Coalitions are a source of power for unions, not simply because they supplement a union’s objectives with the resources of another organisation but because they help renew unions.”* (Tattersall, 2010, p3)

and

*“Coalitions are not a panacea, but they are an important tool for promoting new political solutions. When they are practiced in a reciprocal and respectful way, coalitions support powerful unionism.”* (Tattersall, 2010, p182)

Tattersall goes on to provide a vivid case study of the successful Public Education [Alliance], which Federation built at the beginning of the century and for which much of the strategy was devised by present Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos.

Key features of that coalition included:

- operating at multiple scale from school hall to local media to statewide coverage, and at all echelons from a local P&C to the minister’s office
- the Vinson Inquiry, structured akin to a Royal Commission, with 28 public hearings and 772 submissions.

When in 2002 teachers, parents and principals launched the Vinson Inquiry paper with a dinner in NSW Parliament House, Angelo Gavrielatos said of the occasion that the “idea was for teachers and parents to symbolically reclaim Parliament, because *the government wasn’t doing its job on education*”. (Tattersall, 2010, p45, emphasis added)

How then, nearly 20 years on, might student and union activists today, in a reciprocal and respectful coalition, devise events that show *“the government isn’t doing its job on the environment”*?

Then there are internal initiatives needed to confirm that our union house is in order, the first of which is maintaining and growing democratic member engagement and support for both the coalition and the campaign. These cannot be taken for granted, they must emerge from expressions of support among the membership and broader community alike.

The template for doing so is found not only in the original Public Education [Alliance] of 20 years ago and the current strategy employed the Gallop Inquiry of 2020-21 (Gallop et al., 2021), but reaching back 50 years to the Green Bans, among which Federation was a first mover. The Green Bans were characterised by a tactic whereby the first call for action came from a community expression of protest, such as a meeting or town hall vote demanding union action to protect a community asset, and the second call came from union members then voting democratically to act on that community request for a Green Ban (Burgmann & Burgmann, 2017, pp176–177).

## DISCUSSION

An equivalent multi-stage, decision-making structure is needed here to ensure buy-in and legitimacy of the campaign among members. As the community calls, so the union's members respond, and thus the coalition builds strength and power. **That equivalent process today would require that the student movement calls for union support, and union members respond with a democratic vote to do so.**

One contemporary example of such is to be found in the Hunter Jobs Alliance launched in 2020 as a community-led movement with cross-union involvement and featuring prominently both worker and community representatives demanding a just transition for workers in fossil fuel industries (O'Malley, 2020). This alliance was formed with the aid of strategic guidance and logistical input from unions, including Federation officers, and for which Federation holds founding-member status. The founding declaration of the Hunter Jobs Alliance is available at [hunterjobsalliance.org.au/declaration](http://hunterjobsalliance.org.au/declaration).

Other expressions could take such forms as ensuring climate change is a standing agenda item for union meetings, through to teachers showing solidarity with student-led climate actions under the #ClimateStrike umbrella; including practical support for event organising, safety marshalls, police liaison, sound and staging, and expressions of support in news media.

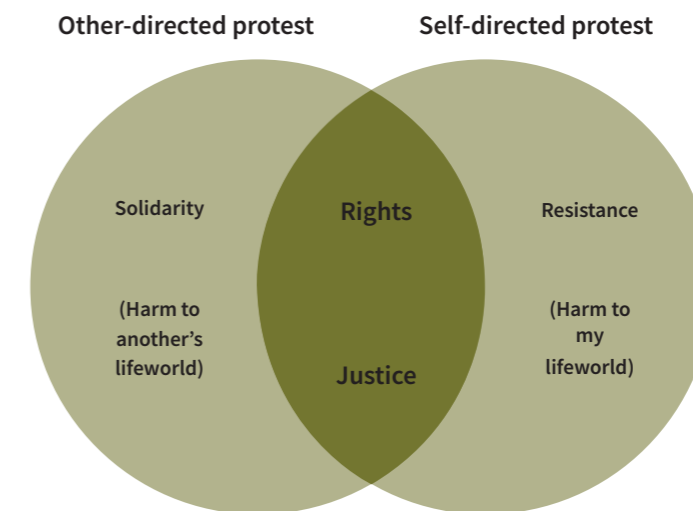
One thing is certain: the level of commitment the union movement brings to the cause of climate action will surely be noted and remembered among the student activists who lead the #ClimateStrikes of today. It is from that level of commitment that those activists will form their own summation about the importance, need and relevance of the union movement to their own working lives on which they now as a generation embark.

### Coda

#### A theoretical proposal to bridge the divide between progressive other-directed and conservative self-directed protest movements

Both progressive and conservative political orientations have protest traditions. Those protest traditions differ in their initial impetus, but merge in terms of their sustaining arguments and remedies sought:

#### Impetus and sustaining arguments



## DISCUSSION

### From ‘your pain is my pain’ to ‘your interest is my interest’

To overcome the sometimes-countervailing pull of solidarity (heart) and self-interest (mind) among the membership, it is instructive to assess both progressive and conservative dynamics that run through many protest movements, including those of unions and Federation specifically.

It is a straightforward to discern that different protest movements may be self-directed or other-directed to varying degrees, by asking *cui bono?*, “who benefits?”, from fulfilling the aims and demands of the protest. Without applying a value judgement or moral hierarchy to these actions, we can attest that protesting for improvements to one’s own salaries and conditions is first and foremost a self-directed protest; and a just one in that it rectifies unfair wages and conditions among a workforce. We can also clearly see that a protest aimed at freeing a political prisoner or standing in solidarity with an oppressed group, is most often other-directed in a similarly just cause.

In general, one could venture that people (and members) of a conservative bent find themselves readier to engage in protest for causes that are self-directed, and those with progressive aims can be more readily called to protest causes that are other-directed. These categories are not mutually exclusive and indeed are at their most powerful when harmonised (Tattersall, 2010, p26). The aphoristic terms offered by Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos, attributed to Saul Alinsky, invoke “a sword of self-interest wielded with a shield of justice”.

### Let us consider a few examples:

It in no way detracts from the justness of the below causes to take note that self-interest impelled many of their activists, and this to some degree explains why they attracted support from otherwise conservatively minded people who found themselves (or those in their close circle) directly affected:

- **Conscription:** Many upright conservative mothers of the anti-conscription “Save our Sons” movement, as made clear by the name, were protesting their sons being conscripted by the National Draft in the Vietnam War period.
- **Marriage equality:** A turning point in the decades-long progressive struggle for marriage equality was when a growing number of otherwise conservative Australians saw clearly that people in their close circles were oppressed by unjust marriage laws. The fact that marriage is itself an inherently conservative institution also lowered the “barrier to participation”.
- **Lock the Gate:** When it was their farming concern threatened by land and water pollution from gas fracking, any number of conservative-voting farmers have proved quite willing to engage in various forms of organised disobedience over a sustained period, taking tea and sharing an unlikely campfire at gas company blockades with white “ferals” and First Nations activists. As a 66-year-old Coonamble, NSW, farmer in this movement was quoted: “I’ve voted conservative all my life, never again” (Hamilton, 2016, pp184-188).

- **Save our (leafy) Suburbs:** There is no shortage of “tree-hugging” conservatives to be found in wealthier suburbs of Sydney who reliably mount a Save our Suburbs activist response when their neighbourhood is the target of developers or highway-builders. NIMBYs they may well be, yet their grievance is validly held.

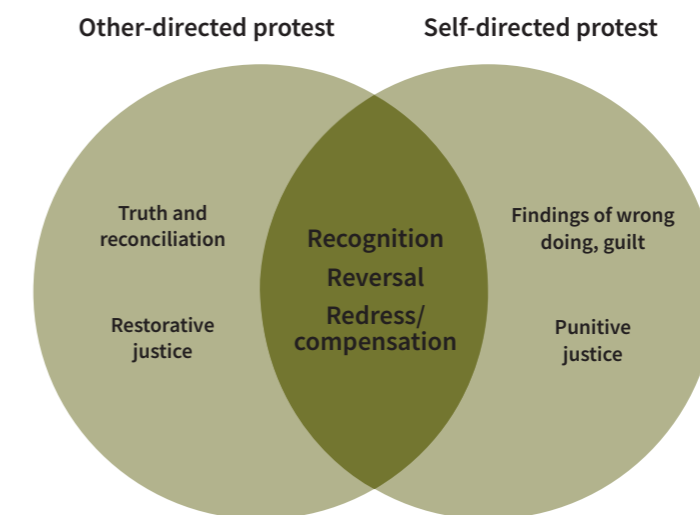
As a counter-factual, we can see in the above list further reason why conservative political parties and voters have tended to reject other valid protest movements, because they do not perceive the grievance as affecting their lifeworld. For example, conservatives in Australia have largely ignored or ridiculed movements such as the Refugee Action Coalition because of the too successful “othering” of refugees by successive Australian governments. It is instructive to see that, tactically, governments are desperate for refugees to have no contact whatsoever with mainland Australians, for as soon as a community embraces them (such as in the case of the

#BacktoBiloela movement) refugees are supported and defended by the community.

In many cases, the anti-conscription protesters didn’t protest until it was their sons. The farmers didn’t protest until it was their (sic) land. But conservatives also live on planet Earth, and this is everybody’s world.

A vector then to engender conservative support for the global environmental movement is in the realisation that the climate threat is harmful to their lifeworld. For now, many a conservative’s default position remains resistant to climate action because they see the remedies as harmful to their lifeworld. Many perceive fossil fuel transitions, renewable energy grids, emissions cuts, zero-growth and circular economies as harmful to their interests, while many further regard as negligible, the risks of climate disruption.

### Remedies sought (‘What do we want?!’)



## DISCUSSION

But in the cause of climate action we have that which overwhelms all categories of interest and political divergence. In the context of the entire globe, it is nonsensical to talk of self and other, as there is no Planet B. Climate disruption places all children in peril; the children of conservatives and progressives alike, and students in every school and sector of education.

But that peril, while shared, is not shared equally. We see it runs along the same socioeconomic fault lines that scar the globe now: the fault lines of poverty, class, systemic racism against First Nations and people of colour, misogyny, ableism, homophobia and transphobia.

The theoretical coda with which this discussion concludes is to propose that in the cause of #ClimateStrikes lies the potential for a totalising protest movement; a movement that aligns union members, teachers and students of any and all political traditions, because the stakes are so high and so grave for everybody.



# CONCLUSION

**THIS STUDY SPEAKS DIRECTLY TO FEDERATION'S LONG-TERM VIABILITY AND MEMBERSHIP DENSITY, BY OFFERING THE UNION AN INSIGHT INTO THE MOTIVATIONS, INTERESTS, PRIORITIES, NEEDS AND ASPIRATIONS OF THE RISING GENERATION WHO WILL COMPRISE THE FUTURE MEMBERSHIP (OR NOT) OF THIS AND OTHER UNIONS.**

When young people can experience the union movement as being tangibly linked to their future wellbeing and pursuit of a safe, stable global climate, they have a vector through which they can perceive purpose and relevance to joining and becoming active members of their union, including as future teachers and Federation members.

A re-emergence of a widespread culture of collective industrial action is of critical importance to Federation. The long-term interests of Federation are served by this revitalisation of collectivist culture and action, for which the #ClimateStrike movement offers young people a crucial lived experience that they will carry forward through their own life trajectories.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the support, input and guidance of:

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- Rethinking Schools founding editor Bob Peterson
- Federation President Angelo Gavrielatos and past president Maurie Mulheron
- Federation officer attached to the Eric Pearson Study Grant committee Dr Mary Fogarty
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- the late Theodora (Dora) Lafkas, scholarly mentor, colleague and friend.

There is one other person to thank, whose family, community and school of Wyaliba NSW were devastated by climate-exacerbated bushfire on 8 November, 2019. Abigail Sparks is a Visual Arts teacher at Glen Innes High School on Ngarabul country, Federation Representative, latterly Councillor and officer-bearer for Glen Innes Teachers Association, and (I'm immensely fortunate and proud to add) my spouse and life partner.

## Eric Pearson Study Grant reports

The researcher is indebted to the contributions and insights of previous Eric Pearson Study Grant reports that touch upon issues explored in this paper. Chronologically these include the reports of John Dixon (1998), Gary Zadkovich (2000), Nicole Calnan (2010), Maurie Mulheron (2014), and Michael de Wall (2015). Issues explored in these and other reports remain current and directly pertinent to the interests of members.

Eric Pearson reports are available from the NSW Teachers Federation's library and also at [nswtf.org.au/eric-pearson-reports](http://nswtf.org.au/eric-pearson-reports).

## Recommended reading from Federation's library

- Burgmann, M., & Burgmann, V. (2017). Green bans red union: The saving of a city (2nd ed). NewSouth Publishing
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# APPENDIX

## SUSTAINING OUR UNITY FORUM ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS

The versions that appear in this Appendix were drafted for the first forum, which took place on 17 September, 2020. Equivalent versions were also produced for the First Nations Sustaining Our Unity forum of 8 December, 2020. The methodology applied to both forums was identical.

*N.B. The visual formatting of this document differs from its original on Google Forms*

### Part 1

#### Expression of Interest, Sustaining Our Unity forum

This form is for student climate activists (aged 18+ by September 2020) to apply.

For any queries about the application process or event email [Researcher’s email address]

\* Required

#### Forum for climate activists

Activist organisations and individuals associated with the student #ClimateStrike movement are urged to submit an Expression of Interest to participate in a one-day research forum to be held via Zoom on 17 September, 2020.

This forum forms part of an independent research project by principal researcher Mercurius Goldstein for the NSW Teachers Federation, funded by the Eric Pearson Study Grant 2020.

Participants will be asked to share their experiences of the #ClimateStrike movement and reflect upon possible futures for collective action, with academics and union leaders also in attendance. Proceedings and individual contributions will remain confidential but general research findings will be published in a report to the NSW Teachers Federation.

Participation will be subject to the final decision of the principal researcher and signing of the research agreement by each participant. Due to ethics requirements, participation is limited to those at least 18 years of age at the date of the forum (17 September).

#### Criteria that will be considered for selection include:

- Nature and extent of involvement with the #ClimateStrike movement to date.
- Membership of an organisation that forms part of the #ClimateStrike movement.
- Formal nomination or support from an organisation that forms part of the #ClimateStrike movement (reference/s may be required).
- The need for the forum, as a whole, to include diverse representation among participants who are First Nations, those with a disability, LGBTIQ+, gender, cultural and linguistic background, rural/regional participants, socioeconomic and/or educational disadvantage.

Student participants will be eligible to receive a \$200 stipend payable at the conclusion of the day’s activities in appreciation of their time and involvement in the forum.

Participants will need to have access to their own internet-enabled PC/laptop/tablet during the day, with sufficient bandwidth to participate in the Zoom forum as a live videoconference session.

Full name \* .....

Pronouns .....

Contact address inc. state/province and country \* .....

Email \* .....

Phone number \* .....

## APPENDIX

Preferred contact method \*

- Email
- Phone (text first, then voice call if needed)

Please outline the nature and extent of your involvement with the student #ClimateStrike movement to date \* Include any activities or roles you believe to be relevant:

Of which activist group(s) associated with the #ClimateStrike movement are you a current or former member? Include any you believe to be relevant: .....

Please advise contact details for a person/reference who the researcher can contact to verify your membership of the organisation(s) you have mentioned. Include any you believe to be relevant: .....

The following will not affect your individual application but will be considered by the researcher for overall representation and diversity among participants:

- First Nations
- Living with a disability
- LGBTIQ+
- Rural/regional background
- Socioeconomic or educational disadvantage
- Culturally or linguistically diverse background
- Prefer not to say

Other .....

Gender .....

Please provide further details about any of the above items if you wish (all information will be treated confidentially): .....

The following will not affect your application but are needed for planning and budgeting purposes:

Current educational institution and course .....

Current work arrangements (inc. usual hours/week) .....

Please read and tick ALL of the following before submitting your application:\*

- I understand that the researcher's decision about my application is final.
- I understand that I will be contacted by the researcher to advise the outcome of my application.
- I understand that my participation will be subject to signing of a research agreement that will indemnify the researcher Mercurius Goldstein from any damages, liability, or other costs arising from my participation in the forum.
- I understand that my contribution to the forum will remain confidential but that general research findings will be published in a research report to the NSW Teachers Federation.
- I understand that this is an independent research project administered by deed of the Eric Pearson Study Grant and does not comprise a decision or action of the NSW Teachers Federation.
- I understand that I will be eligible to receive a \$200 stipend once I have actively participated in the forum on the day.
- I understand that I need to supply my own internet-enabled device capable of running Zoom on the day.
- I understand that the researcher will not be in a position to provide technical support on the day if my device does not work as intended.
- I understand that I will bear any out-of-pocket or incidental expenses arising from my participation in the research forum except those expressly agreed to in writing by the researcher prior.

Any additional comments or information you would like the researcher to be aware of at this point:

.....

## APPENDIX

### Part 2

#### Sustaining Our Unity forum – 17 September, 2020

#### PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

##### (1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in research investigating student climate activists' experiences of participating in the #ClimateStrike movement.

This forum forms part of an independent research project by principal researcher Mercurius Goldstein for the NSW Teachers Federation, funded by the Eric Pearson Study Grant 2020.

Participants will be asked to share their experiences of the #ClimateStrike movement and reflect upon possible futures for collective action, with academics and union members also in attendance.

Proceedings and individual contributions will remain confidential but general research findings will be published in a report to the NSW Teachers Federation.

You have been invited to participate in this study and this Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By participating in the research forum you are telling us that you:

- Understand what you have read.
- Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

##### (2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher:

- Mr Mercurius Goldstein (M.Ed Research, B.Ed Hons I, Dip. Gov.)

##### (3) What will the study involve for me?

The study involves you participating in a series of live videoconference sessions on Thursday, 17 September, 2020, including small-group interactions with five to eight other student climate activists, with a research facilitator and observer present during your discussions.

In order to participate, you will need access to an online device capable of running Zoom videoconference sessions as a participant, and a live internet connection throughout the day.

The live sessions will include a webinar presentation by the researcher to outline the aims and process for your videoconference participation.

You will then be assigned to online "breakout rooms" to engage with a set of written stimulus materials (quotes from people who have participated in activist campaigns in the past), and to prepare a written collective small-group response to the materials that are presented to you.

Your responses will be kept securely, and data records will be anonymised. Your identity will not be disclosed in the research. No part of the videoconference sessions will be recorded.

##### (4) How much of my time will the study take?

You will be asked to put aside the hours on September 17, 2020, from 9am-3pm. The expected sessions will be:

- 9.00am live webinar via Zoom (45 minutes)
- 10.00am-11.30am (up to 90 minutes) small group participation via Zoom engaging with the stimulus materials.
- 11.30am-1.30pm including a lunch break, time offline to consider the material as an individual and your intended responses.
- 1.30pm-3.00pm (up to 90 minutes) – a final Zoom small-group session with your co-participants to compare and submit your agreed collective responses to the stimulus materials.

## APPENDIX

### (5) Who can take part in the study?

Student climate activists who are at least 18+ years of age as at 17 September, 2020, are eligible to participate.

### (6) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researcher or anyone else at the NSW Teachers Federation.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. If you complete part of the forum but then decide to stop and you do not want your recorded responses to remain in the study please contact the researcher (details below).

### (7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks associated with taking part in this study. You will need access to an internet-enabled device capable of running Zoom videoconference sessions during the study, and this equipment and internet connection will need to be supplied by you. The researcher will not be in a position to offer technical support if your device or connection does not operate as intended.

### (8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

In recognition of the time you are contributing, participants who attend all live videoconference sessions during the day will be eligible for a payment of \$200, payable after 17 September, 2020. The payment will be made from the Eric Pearson Study Grant and will require you to send your bank deposit account details to the NSW Teachers Federation accounts section for processing of your payment. Details for this process will be provided to participants at the end of the final videoconference session on the day of the forum.

### (9) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications.

### (10) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

### (11) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, the researcher Mr Mercurius Goldstein will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact the researcher on [Researcher's phone number] or email: [Researcher's email address].

### (12) Will I be told the results of the study?

The results of the study will be published in a publicly available report. The NSW Teachers Federation will contact you with details of how to access the report once it is available.

### (13) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

The Eric Pearson Study Grant is administered by the NSW Teachers Federation and officers of the Federation have oversight of the conduct of the research. If any aspect of your participation in the research causes concerns for you, please contact the following officer:

Officer attached to Eric Pearson Study Grant, NSW Teachers Federation:

- Telephone: +61 2 9217 2100
- Email: mail@nswtf.org.au

*This information sheet is for you to keep*

## APPENDIX

### Part 3

NB — The visual formatting of this document differs from its original on Google Forms

#### Responses to stimulus quotes

##### Sustaining Our Unity forum Thursday, 17 September, 2020

[1] **BEING IN THE MOVEMENT** – *“For many of the young people caught up in those heady times, the protests defined us. We felt we were making the world a better place, and we were. Although a few moved into politics and non-government organisations, most went on to careers, families and mortgages ... Since then, new generations of activists have grown up and discovered the personal fulfilment that comes from committing, if only for a time, to a cause beyond oneself.”* Social activist: 20th century.

What is your group response to this statement? Consider what truths you think it captures and what limitations it reveals. Are there aspects of your own activism for which the above resonates, are there aspects of your personal activism that warrant further attention, why do you think so?

[2] **BEING IN THE MOVEMENT** – *“It was like an ocean ... There was a feeling that an enormous mass of human beings had united for a common purpose and that purpose electrified the air. There was a feeling that the people had taken over ... There was a feeling that this is our city, it belongs to us. It belongs to the ordinary people. I had never seen that before, and those who did not participate missed something in their lives.”* Peace activist: 20th century.

What does the above phenomenon look like in the 21st century?

[3] **FINDING SUPPORTERS** – *“I think community opinion was pretty split down the middle. Talkback callers were almost universally against us and most op-ed pieces were running the line that we’d been hugely irresponsible ... We were copping it from the police, the media and our own bosses. It wasn’t until a few days later when I got on to the bus to go to work and all the passengers suddenly broke out into applause that I realised some people were on our side.”* Activist protesting against APEC forum, Sydney 2007.

How do you know you have allies? Where do you find them? Do you have enough allies and how would you generate more?

[4] **DEALING WITH TROLLS** – *“One man spat at my feet and a woman actually spat on me ... It was as if we had unleashed a strange loathing bottled up inside them.”* Peace activist and Vietnam War protester.

*“The Nazis were very active. They threw a brick through my window and wrote ‘Red Rat’ over my house, which we later changed to ‘Fred Rat’ because it sounded more friendly.”* Anti-Apartheid activist.

Discuss the oppositional responses you have received to your activism? What effect did it have on you? How has it affected your co-activists? What strategies have you developed in response?

[5] **ETHICAL DISOBEDIENCE** – *“We mustn’t be frightened to educate others and fight, but not in a war-like way, to protect the earth and let everything run free. I don’t want to shoot or bomb the people from [company] and the others who are destroying the country because two wrongs don’t make a right. I think if I can help them to wake up to what they are doing then that will be punishment enough.”* Aboriginal Land Rights, environmental and anti-nuclear activist.

How important is a peace ethic in environmental protest action? Where is “a line” you believe shouldn’t be crossed?

[6] **THE COURAGE OF DISOBEDIENCE** – *“I’m a terrible chicken myself, but the other people were bold and brave, and we egged each other on.”* Life-long social and cultural activist, artist, and feminist.

Excerpt from a 2013 poem by J.A. in the Occupy movement: *“Self-proclaimed welfare queens, poets and rappers, old and young, rolled in wheelchairs, walked with walkers, rode in buses or ran with breathless abandon, carrying signs and banners, dancing to music and speeches, marching to whatever drummer they chose.”*

From where do you find the courage to disobey? What is at risk for you personally when you rebel? How do you approach this risk?

[7] **SCHOOL’S OUT?** – *“My friend’s daughter comes home angry from high school many days. She goes to a well-funded public school, she does well, takes honours classes, gets A and Bs and is on sports teams and clubs. But she knows our schools were designed in the industrial era. Our school systems were designed, not only before social networking, but before Einstein and his theories of relativity and uncertainty principles. It’s a new game. She knows it. Do we?”* Occupy Wall Street activist.

Discuss your experiences of the interaction between your school/university and the #ClimateStrike events you have participated in.

[8] **INVOLVEMENT WITH UNIONS** – *“The trade union movement put bans on and wouldn’t transport the [South African rugby team] around ... They also put bans on supplies and the like to the hotels where the players were staying. They actually made the hotel go broke in Sydney.”* Anti-Apartheid activist.

*“To our surprise, the [workers] on the job had no hesitation in deciding to go out on strike. The union’s intervention put the university under intense pressure and it soon capitulated.”* Union leader whose 1970s blue-collar, and predominantly heterosexual, workers took strike action in support of a gay student who the university was excluding from college

What would an equivalent action look like in this century?

# APPENDIX

## Part 4

NB – The visual formatting of this document differs from its original on Google Forms

### Feedback form – Sustaining Our Unity research forum

Feedback is anonymous (unless you wish to identify yourself in the comments) and will assist the researcher in preparation of the research report. Other than question 1, all other questions are optional.

\* Required

I participated as \*

- A student activist
- A facilitator

The application documents for the forum (online form and participant information statement) were suitable for me to use to apply for the forum.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

The forum purpose and my role were clearly explained to me during the overview session from 9.00am–9.45am.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

The roles of other people present at the forum were clearly explained to me during the overview session from 9.00am–9.45am.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

The quotes presented to my group felt meaningful and relevant to my experiences as a climate activist.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

The online tools available to us as a small group on the day were suitable for us to prepare shared statements in response to the quotes.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

In my group, I think there was a good general level of shared participation, contribution and co-operation among my fellow activists.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

Much of the time, my group were readily able to arrive at a shared statement, or otherwise to be clear about reasons why a shared statement was difficult to arrive at.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

I think our group was appropriately supported by the facilitator during small-group discussions.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

I felt clear about how I could access assistance during the forum if the need arose.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

# APPENDIX

Overall, I think the forum was a worthwhile use of my time on the day.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Other: .....

Please feel welcome to record your thoughts and feelings about the experience of developing shared ideas – striving to identify the position of “we” more so than the position of “me”.

Your answer: .....

If you encountered difficulties in applying for or joining the forum, please outline what occurred and how it was resolved.

Your answer: .....

During the day a range of possible tools were available to your group both within Zoom and via other communications apps and software. Please describe what your group found to be a workable way to prepare and submit shared ideas together (and also any that you tried that proved unworkable or ineffective for the purpose of preparing shared work).

Your answer: .....

If you encountered any difficulties during the forum please feel welcome to record what occurred and how it was resolved (please avoid identifying any people by name if possible, e.g. refer to “a student” or “the facilitator” or “the researcher” rather than using their name).

Your answer: .....

*Please feel welcome to add suggestions about arrangements that would have improved your experience on the day.*





