

Tool: Australian Nonviolent Direct Action Stories

Time: 45-60 minutes

Goals:

- to introduce participants to a range of recent Australian nonviolent actions
- to help participants imagine themselves taking action by use of case studies that are more accessible than some of the famous international cases often referred to in other parts of NV training

Materials needed: Australian NVDA stories pack and Questions

How it works:

1. Break up participants into small groups of 2-4 (or as appropriate) and give each group copies of one story (or let them choose their own). Give each group a copy of the Questions [5 mins].
2. Small groups read the story and discuss the questions – they don't have to answer every question necessarily, let them go with the flow [20 mins – yes, they need it]
3. Resume plenary for small groups to report back with a quick summary of the action and their answers to 2-3 of the questions [20 mins].

Options: depending on group size and time, you could give each group 2 stories, or stay in a large group and read through a few together.

Time Saver: you could cut this to about 25-30 minutes by not coming back into plenary for report-backs.

Questions to hand out:

- What spoke to you about this story?
- Do you think the action was effective?
- Would/could you participate in such an action?
- What do you fear?
- What excites you?
- What do you need to know before you would take part in this kind of action?
- How would you need to prepare for such actions?
- Are you prepared to be arrested? (if relevant to your story)

Pine Gap 6

Pine Gap is a military spy base for the United States located 20km outside Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. Pine Gap gathers military intelligence and uses a satellite tracking system to pinpoint targets in U.S. bombing raids on Iraq and Afghanistan. It is also the command centre for the 'Missile Defence System', an integral part of the US 'Star Wars' system enabling the US to dominate and control space.

At dawn on Human Rights Day 2005, a 'Citizen's Inspection' took place causing Pine Gap to shut down for five hours. A group of four Christian pacifists calling themselves "Christians Against ALL Terrorism" successfully broke into the base despite announcing their plans to security in advance and wearing rather visible white overalls with 'Citizens' Inspection Team' emblazoned in red.

The Pine Gap 6, as they became known, declared that in the context of the War on Terror and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, they "wanted to bring some moral and intellectual consistency into the debate on terrorism." In describing their motivation and critique of public policy, they wrote:

Christians Against ALL Terrorism condemns terrorism in all its forms, including the state terrorism behind the U.S and Australia's illegal invasion and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan. In order to be morally consistent, we cannot distinguish between the terrorist acts of a suicide bomber in Baghdad, or of a U.S jet bomber in Fallujah. In both cases innocents are murdered and maimed for a political objective.

The group did not resist arrest, but did defend themselves in court under what is called the 'necessity defence'. Their testimony moved the jury to tears at several moments. The judge was so impressed by their conviction and nonviolent consistency that she refused to give them gaol sentences despite prosecution requests.

Despite the tiny size of their group, the Pine Gap 6 successfully put Pine Gap back into the media spotlight and especially back on the map for the peace movement. In doing so, they opened space for discussion about Australia's complicity in acts of terror.

(extract from Whelan, J. "Christian Nonviolent Direct Action as Public Theology", conference paper presented to AAMS/PACT conference "Christian Mission in the Public Square", 2008. URL: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/2008/10/07/christian-nonviolent-direct-action-as-public-theology/>)

Samuel Hill 5

'Talisman Sabre' is the name given to the largest war games exercise in the Southern Hemisphere. It involves 20,000 American and 10,000 Australian troops practising for war at a place called Shoalwater Bay, near Rockhampton.

As part of a wider peace convergence, five activists entered the military training area at Samuel Hill, found the main control centre base and walked openly down the middle of the airstrip. When soldiers approached them, the group assured them that they were unarmed and peaceful, and asked them to play Frisbee.

To our surprise and delight, they did. I asked to see their generals as we had two letters to give them. They then called their commanding officer who shut down the base, and they invited us inside for coffee and lunch. We spent about an hour and a half talking with both Australian and US soldiers about Iraq, violence and nonviolence, and the exercises themselves before being arrested by Queensland police and taken to Rockhampton.

The following statement was released by the group to explain their action:

We cannot stand by while our country plans the destruction of our brothers and sisters in other countries and the environment at Shoalwater Bay.

We believe that practicing for war only means more war. That is why we must imagine peace, embody peace, practice peace.

Another world is possible – that is why we act.

The 'Samuel Hill 5' were one of two groups to enter the military base. In remaining in the open and engaging in dialogue with the armed forces, the group gave a public demonstration not just of commitment to a more peaceful world, but also of an alternate way to engage in protest. As they noted, "protests are often restricted to yelling from behind a fence. We wanted to change the dynamic, to engage face to face with the people behind the uniform, and for them to do the same with us."

(edited extract from Whelan, J. "Christian Nonviolent Direct Action as Public Theology", conference paper presented to AAMS/PACT conference "Christian Mission in the Public Square", 2008. URL: <http://www.paceebene.org.au/2008/10/07/christian-nonviolent-direct-action-as-public-theology/>)

Greenpeace destroys GM wheat

Greenpeace protesters have broken into a CSIRO experimental farm in Canberra to destroy a crop of genetically modified wheat. In the early hours of this morning a group of Greenpeace protesters scaled the fence of the CSIRO experimental station at Ginninderra in the capital's north.

Greenpeace says activists were wearing Hazmat protective clothing and were equipped with weed string trimmers. They say the entire crop of genetically modified wheat has been destroyed.

About half a hectare of GM wheat is being grown on the site, as part of Australia's first outdoor trials. No genetically modified wheat strain had ever been approved for cropping in Australia before.

Last month the CSIRO received permission to conduct Australia's first trial in which humans will eat GM wheat. The wheat's genes have been modified to lower the glycemic index and increase fibre to create a product which will improve bowel health and increase nutritional value. Animal feeding trials of up to three months have been conducted, with human trials at least six months away.

Greenpeace says it has taken action because of concerns over health, cross-contamination and the secrecy surrounding the experiments. Campaigner Laura Kelly says the Federal Government needs to put an end to testing GM wheat in Australia. She says parts of the United States and many countries throughout Europe have already rejected the crop, and Australia should do the same.

"No one is looking after the health of Australians. Julia Gillard isn't standing up to foreign GM countries to protect our daily bread so Greenpeace has to," she said.

CSIRO chief director of Plant Industries Jeremy Burdon says the organisation is still assessing the extent of the damage. He says it is a setback to an important global food security program.

"Until we actually know what the assessment comes out at it's hard to say but if it sets it back by a year it's a significant amount of effort by those people involved," he said.

ACT Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury used to work for Greenpeace and says he is not surprised the group has taken such action. "It's always very controversial these sorts of actions, but you have to stand up for what you believe in sometimes," he said. "Greenpeace has clearly formed a view that the best way to both draw attention to this issue and to potentially protect the human food chain in Australia is to take this action."

Mr Rattenbury says Greenpeace has a track record of breaking the law to highlight problems. "I've certainly been involved in action in the past where Greenpeace has broken the law and that has been necessary to highlight what we've considered at the time to be a greater issue than perhaps a simple trespass," he said.

ACT police have confirmed they are investigating but have not released any further information.

ABC new report: Greenpeace destroys GM wheat, Jessica Nairn, Thu 14 Jul 2011

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2011-07-14/20110714-greenpeace-gm-protest/2794272>

73 Arrested in Coal Protest

A group of approximately 70 people who were arrested on Sunday 5th December 2010 for blockading coal wagons entering Bayswater Power Station – Australia's single largest source of carbon pollution.

Bayswater, near Muswellbrook in the Hunter Valley, is the site of a second proposed power station (Bayswater B), one of 12 new coal power stations on the cards across Australia. At the same time, coal mining is undergoing massive expansion in the Hunter Valley – with implications not just for climate change but also farming and other rural industries, and for human and ecological health. The NSW Government is approving record numbers of new coal mines across the state, and construction underway at the Port of Newcastle will see a doubling of coal export capacity with further expansion planned.

Approximately 130 people occupied the railway tracks adjacent to Bayswater. They were supported by hundreds more who remained by the roadside. The protestors refused to leave until the NSW government declares a moratorium on new coal-fired power, and commits to no new coal in NSW and a transition to renewable energy.

Ultimately, 73 people were arrested after blockading the railway tracks for 7 hours, under a hot sun and through a short thunderstorm. Charges included enter and remain on rail infrastructure, failure to comply with police direction, and enter and remain on enclosed lands. It was one of the largest civil disobedience actions in recent Australian history.

In court, all first-time offenders had their charges dismissed under section 10 of the Summary Offences Act, while others received \$250 fines.

The event received nationwide media coverage, including sympathetic reporting in the local (coal community) newspaper. Electricity production was unaffected.

One of the primary aims of the action was to provide a safe opportunity for people to take their first arrestable action. More than half of those arrested were in this category.

Edited version of a media release for Insights, the magazine of the Uniting Church in NSW-ACT, in 2011.

Countering an ADF Recruitment Drive

Introduction

On Wednesday 5th August 2009 the Australian Defence Force entered our municipality (City of Casey) to recruit young people to join the military. We were quite concerned that the ADF were in our neighbourhood to sign up another generation of Australians to engage in acts of violence on other soils around the world under the guise of 'making a difference', 'travel the world' and 'earn lots of money'. As a community we agreed to become a public witness at this public event to give young people access to the complete truth.

Arrival

We arrived at the Civic Centre early to centre our minds and bodies. After this we dispersed to our strategic locations. Krystal Spencer headed inside to be a presence to the ADF personal organizing the event and to read the atmosphere and relay information. While Sarah Williams, Jacob Bolton, Niki Ooustwood and Simon Reeves split into two teams and positioned ourselves on the two paths leading to the recruiting session.

We were dressed nicely and welcomed people as they exited their cars for the recruitment session. We handed them an information flyer we had put together and offered them the all Australian favourite treat - 'Minties'.

The flyer

The flyer we put together wasn't glossy or colourful like the ADF ones, but still aimed to make an impact. The front cover had a picture of a soldier helping a young boy and in bold asked the questions 'Want to make a difference and want your life to count?' Everyone who walked past us took our little flyer, little did they know, that inside the flyer the realities of joining the military were addressed such as 'you may be harmed or killed' and 'you may have to harm or kill another person'.

It also included some facts and myths of war. The other page informed the reader 'there are other ways to make a difference' and included information on how to start being a peacemaker with a couple of nice quotes from Mother Theresa and Gandhi.

After we gave the attendees a flyer we assisted them with directions to the ADF meeting for which they were quite grateful as it was getting a little dark.

We gave away 60 of those flyers and people kept even coming up and asking for them while they poured into the building. The recruitment was well attended by around 130 people and I'm sure we could have given away that many if we'd printed just a few more! We were prepared to be sprung and asked to stop what we were doing. Yet, the closest we came to that was a member of the ADF bounding down the stairs just as we were running out of flyers and with a confused smile saying "hey thanks for helping us?!?". For which we said "well no problem, but our flyers are a little bit different to yours". Instantly her hand reached for her mobile phone and a worried look came across her face, where she said "um, I may have to call my supervisor" and she took one of our last flyers and whisked back upstairs.

All handed out, we regrouped for a quick debrief where we got some feedback from Krystal who'd gone inside. Krystal told us that the place was packed and everywhere she looked people were sitting down reading our flyers while they waited for the night to begin! Encouraged by this news we decided to follow-up our witness by attending the session and asking poignant questions during the public question time.

Inside we scattered throughout the crowd. At the start of proceedings the ADF announced "you may have received another flyer as you entered tonight, it is black and white, not like

ours which are very colourful and people may want to...I don't know...throw them in the bin (pause and awkward silence, right moving along...)"

The ADF talked up the life of a military soldier and promoted all the 'benefits'

At the end came question time where, scattered throughout the crowd, we were able to ask poignant questions addressing what was left out of the presentation.

Thus we asked questions such as 'what does a combat role actually involve?' and 'can you tell us about some of the other negatives such as potentially getting harmed or killed?' These were uncomfortable questions, linking back to the flyer we had handed out at the beginning of the evening.

The atmosphere changed from the attempted portrayal of a glamorous and exciting military career to an uncomfortable sense that there was more going on, which was revealed by a slightly red faced presenter struggling for a way to avoid speaking the truth. Perhaps the most confronting question we asked resulted in a presenter attempting to explain what compensation is involved if you unfortunately become mentally or psychologically traumatized from participating in armed conflict.

At the end of the night we spent some time with some youth workers. They informed us that they were deeply struck by our questions and flyer. They expressed disappointment that they had encouraged and brought their young people along to consider the opportunity of joining the ADF. The young people themselves told us when they read the flyer they said 'flipping hell we're not going to kill any people or nothing!' (Perhaps in slightly more colourful language!).

As we were leaving we were confronted by another youth worker known to us who holds a significant position in the local area who expressed extreme displeasure at our actions, telling us our actions were of 'poor form' and how dare we upstage the ADF who had rightfully booked the venue and therefore were entitled to present anything they wanted too. Whilst initially feeling attacked and vulnerable, we were able to put aside any anger and engage in a very positive dialogue around our youth work principles which espouse 'do no harm' whether they are our own young people or any in the global youth community.

The decision to attend this public ADF event was easy; gaining the courage to convey a countercultural message was more difficult. We would have struggled to do this on our own. It was only with the knowledge that together we were doing this that it was made possible.

Edited Extract from JAHWORK CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY in Doveton, ACTION REPORT (5/8/09)

War Veteran Fights for the Future

BILL Ryan fought at Kokoda to protect Australia from the Japanese in World War II.

Now, more than 70 years later, he is fighting another battle that he maintains is every bit as important.

At the age of 91, Mr Ryan has travelled from Sydney to stand with environmentalists in the Leard State Forest.

He is willing to risk both his liberty and his health to disrupt construction of Whitehaven Coal's mine at Maules Creek.

Speaking to The Leader from the blockade's front line yesterday, Mr Ryan said the open-cut mine, from which up to 13 million tonnes of coal will be extracted each year, should not go ahead.

"I'm a veteran of World War II and fought in the Kokoda campaign and there was a battle against the Japanese to save the land," he said.

"There is a bigger battle today to save our land and our planet, because we've been upping the use of fossil fuels and I feel there's no future for our young ones unless we turn to renewables."

Last week, NSW Minerals Council chief executive officer Stephen Galilee described the protesters as "a small group of usual suspects".

But Mr Ryan, who is legally blind and had to be accompanied to the protest site by his 65-year-old son, clearly does not fit the stereotype.

"There are people from all walks of life here, including a number with university degrees," he said.

"I think it's a really good mix and the people are looking after me and providing me with shade, which I'm really appreciative of."

News item in the Northern Daily Leader, 29/1/14.

URL: <http://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/2052094/war-veteran-fights-for-the-future/>