

Postgraduate Degrees in Agitprop

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WHEN reading about the anti-globalization rallies reported in the papers from Sydney last month against the World Trade Organisation, one has to wonder about the warped ideas of those cosseted middle-class children who seem so determined to keep the starving children of the Third World impoverished. At the time of the demos, the world trade ministers meeting inside the Novotel Hotel in Sydney were striking a deal to deliver life-saving medicines to poor nations.

Where do the ideas come from? As protester and Australian flag-burner Elizabeth O'Shea explained, she became radicalized by the ideas taught at her elite Lauriston private school. This privileged education is continued, readers will be pleased to learn, at our Universities. I mean officially. The RMIT University in Melbourne has several departments and courses dedicated to the cause. It has a Community Advocacy Unit that teaches how to become a more effective activist, a Centre for Global Sustainability and a Globalisation Institute. Victoria University has announced a new Postgraduate Program on Public Advocacy and Action, developed with the support of Greenpeace, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad and Amnesty International Australia. Similar courses can be found throughout Australia within faculties in our universities.

The truth is, there is a growing market for universities to train ideologues and activists. And of course, the Dawkins units are ready-made to accommodate. Behind them are the unions and NGOs. The NGOs are extremely wealthy, with a large turnover of participants, so they need a continuous stream of trained activists. Using universities saves them money on training, and provides a convenient ideological 'screening' process.

Just imagine, a B.A. Hons major in Agitprop. Practical sessions presumably will vary, depending on what's on at the time. The RMIT Advocacy Unit's Website is advertising a conference on Asylum Seekers and Australian Activism, boasting the rise of a 'new social movement'.

The 'Centre for Global Sustainability' is a 'special' project of the Vice-chancellor, Ruth Dunkin. It instructs students in the virtues of triple-bottom-line accounting, presumably so that when they go out into industry they can hone the skills needed to ensure that their employer goes broke ... ethically. Like RMIT. There are rumours that it is going broke—and

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that students are demanding Dunkin resign. Not the sort of activism she perhaps had in mind. But at least the Uni will be ethically sustainable. She has called on staff to take part in an Asylum-Seeker Support Working Party to propose specific action for the university to take.

This Vice-Chancellor has also created a Globalisation Institute. Well, it's actually an *Anti-Globalisation* Institute, but they don't call it that. Full of self-satisfying post-modern coded phrases such as 'configurations of transnationalism', 'discourses of critical engagement', and 'analyzing the role of culturally diverse diasporic com-

munities'—you quickly get the drift.

The head of the Institute, Professor Paul James reveals that they shy away from economic analysis. You know, the sort of analysis that shows how much better off the poor are through globalization. He focuses on the 'local disruption' that he believes *corrupts* third world cultures. He must be proud that Mugabe has so successfully withstood the corrupting influence of free trade and the rule of law.

His flavour of the month is Tom Frank, author of the book *One Market under God*. He had him out to lecture at the Institute. Frank runs the tired old orthodox Marxist line that we're all dupes, but no-one knows it except him But it appeals to Professor James. After all, those poor peasants with children to feed don't want to be suckered into getting ahead in life. Forget about Barun Mitra, director of the Liberty Institute in New Delhi, attending the WTO Conference in Sydney. He organizes street hawkers and African and Indian farmers to protest at what he calls the 'sustainable poverty' agenda of groups like the Globalisation Institute.

So. There you have it. Robert (Ouch!) Manne, indulging in special pleading recently in *The Age*, as he does, this time on federal reforms to the tertiary sector, suggested that one unfortunate outcome of Brendan Nelson's reforms may be a 'retreat of the traditional disciplines to the sandstone universities'. He feels that if this does happen, 'it will be a great cultural loss'. Well, if these sorts of courses, conducted in red-brick universities, are in any way 'traditional disciplines', the Nelson reforms might be a good thing, and a gain for everyone.

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