

Personal Stories: Christian Activism

Blood on the Brisbane Stock Exchange, 15 May 1972

By John Stanwell

Towards the end of the Vietnam War, protests around the world focused on the 'corporatisation' of the war. The United States implied that the war was over by withdrawing most of its troops, but it in fact used its technological might and air superiority to escalate the war. The damage inflicted on the Vietnamese countryside was significant and indiscriminate; the increase in profits to the US corporations supplying the war technology was substantial.

In Brisbane, eight young people — including an Anglican priest — decided on a provocative protest that struck at the symbolic beneficiary of this corporatisation of the war: the Stock Exchange.

While not all of us were Christians, the protest drew parallels to Jesus evicting the money-lenders from the temple. In our case, we threw (animal) blood on the Stock Exchange trading boards.

We were sentenced to weekend detention in Boggo Road gaol — eight weekends for the men and five for the women.

The protest succeeded in gaining considerable media coverage but, in a bitter irony, the main media interest related to the long-haired male protesters having our hair cut forcibly in gaol on the second weekend. I still have some of my hair from that day.



John Stanwell's hair, letter, news clipping and tobacco tin from the Blood on the Stock Exchange demonstration, 1972
Collection of John Stanwell
Photograph by Carl Warner