Our Radical Past: Protest in 60s and 70s Brisbane / oral history
Drew Hutton and Adrian Skerritt

Interviewee: Drew Hutton (DH)
Interviewer: Adrian Skerritt (AS)

AS: Drew, you are one of Queensland's great public speakers and campaigners for a better world. Whenever I've heard you speak at rallies or public meetings, I've always been struck by your compassion for people, your ability to explain complex ideas to large groups and your capacity to inspire. Today, I'd like to explore with you the evolution of your political ideas in the 60s and 70s but before we do, could you talk about your journey from Chinchilla to Brisbane Grammar to a university campus here in Brisbane.

DH: Sure. I was born in a little town called Chinchilla which is on the western Darling Downs, in 1947. I was the product of what I described to my father as post war lust and I spent the first 20 years of my life there. It's a bit ironic in a way because Chinchilla is now the coal seam gas capital of the world, you know, it's got thousands of gas wells all around it. But in those days, it was just a sleepy little country town. My father was a butcher, my mother was a teacher, a primary school teacher. Not at all wealthy, very small business people. But they decided to send me away to boarding school when I was in year 9. We didn't have a high school at Chinchilla at the time, so I went to the Brisbane Grammar School in 1961 and I spent four years of my life there. I ended up as the school captain and did quite well in both sport and scholastically.

AS: So, they were, by and large, happy years?

DH: They were good years, yes. I mean, I went to a very authoritarian school. Brisbane Grammar School was extremely authoritarian at the time, and brutal even. And I suspect that that helped my form my anarchist politics just in the period after school.

AS: Were you aware of that at the time?

DH: Oh yes, I hated that aspect of the school. I loved the opportunities for sport and the fact that it gave me an opportunity to get out of the countryside and see a bit of the rest of the world. But yeah, I hated the authoritarianism of the place. And I tried in my own pathetic ways to blunt that authoritarianism too whenever I could but, yeah, it …

AS: When you say blunted, in what way?

DH: Oh, I would take on the head master who was a fearsome character, six foot seven, a brutal man. And I'd confront him about different things.

AS: And how did he respond when he was challenged like that?

DH: Oh, like the brute he was.

AS: Right.

DH: And you know, he was screaming at me to get out of his office or whatever but …

AS: That sort of set you up for challenging authoritarian governments later on.

DH: Yeah, I suppose it did, it didn't occur to me at the time. I just thought the man was just a pig and I wanted to let him know that that's what I thought of him. And I also see that the system of terror used to transmit itself down from him to the teachers then to the older students and they would transmit it on to the younger students. And I would… I suppose most of my effort would have gone into trying to mitigate the effects on the younger students, especially the more vulnerable ones, you know, the gay kids, the kids from overseas, the bullying that went on. And you know, I used to, as I say, in my pathetic way, to try to stop that. And I didn't like the elitism of the place either. There were two sorts of ideologies in the school actually, there was the prevailing ideology which was that -I suppose the formal ideology - which was that, 'we're a school which is producing tomorrow's leaders and they're going to have to therefore exhibit all the upright characteristics of the leaders of the community'. But then what that ideology really was, that's what they would say on speech night but really what it was, was 'we're here to provide the leaders of the corporate world in the years to come. And teaching people how to screw other people', basically, was what the unofficial ideology was.

There was an oppositional ideology in the school, to which I moved actually. Some of the teachers and some of the students were [interested in] what you would call liberalism, you know, John Stuart Mill's type liberalism, free speech and the free play of ideas and those sorts of things which the headmaster regarded as treason. And so, even though I was the school captain and had a lot of those sort of, you know, broomstick up the bum type attitudes that you had in private schools in those days, I still identified with an oppositional, you know…

AS: So, when you moved to university, you had a sense of the arbitrary use of power and authority and compassion for people who are doing it tough, and injustice.

DH: Sure.

AS: So, could you describe a little of the political and social landscape that you encountered when you first went to university.

DH: Yeah, well the first idea you have to get rid of when you talk about university in the mid-60s is that you are going from a place like Grammar - which was extremely authoritarian - to a place of light, liberty and learning, you know.

AS: And is that how it struck you university was?

DH: No, it wasn't like that.

AS: Oh.

DH: No, no. You turned up at university in your white shirt and your tie and your dark trousers and I can remember girls wearing gloves and hats and handbags and stuff in 1965, in my first year at university. But things were changing and once they started, they changed very drastically. People pretty soon… I mean, I've seen some of the old photos from '66 and '67 and people like Dan O'Neill and Mitch Thompson and so on,

they are still in their white shirts and ties, but it wasn't too long before jeans and t-shirts were the order of the day. And ideas did begin to flow but they didn't flow largely in people's lectures. There were some pretty conservative lecturers out there and academic life was fairly conservative, but the real life was in the refectory and in the rallies that were held. I spent most of my years, my two years at university, I must admit, trying to get to the 1968 Olympics in athletics so a lot of my energy did not go into radical politics, but I was well aware of what was happening on campus.

AS: Did you run into the Society for Democratic Action?

DH: Yes, I did. And in fact, I'd known Brian Laver at school. I went to Grammar, he went to Churchie.

AS: And he was a key figure in that group?

DH: Yes, he was. I played tennis against Brian at school and so I knew him at university. I knew him just to say hello to and have brief conversations with, I didn't get terribly involved with him or any of the others in the radical movement. But I can remember going to talks by Humphrey McQueen for example, in '65, Humphrey was on campus then, he was one of the few people who were really out there. I mean, Humphrey was out there, a good speaker and quite radical and challenging. But then by '66, the people like Brian and Mitch and Jim Beatson and various others were very active in the new left and SDA, Students for Democratic Action. I'm not sure when that was actually set up but certainly around about '66, there was a lot of activity on campus. And you learnt more around a refectory table than you did in lectures and you learnt more at rallies. One thing I liked about Brian Laver and his speeches was that he would continually refer to books and readings that he'd done and that would prompt people to then go and read those things.

AS: And what were people reading at the time?

DH: Well, not a lot that was radical. I remember I was trying to find out about the Vietnam War in '66, '67 and because it had just started it was a key issue, you know, '66 election was very important in terms of conscription and the war. And there were two books on Vietnam in the whole library at the University of Queensland and neither of them was certainly a radical analysis of the war or of Vietnamese history, so you'd go along to a rally to learn about Vietnam and learn about various other things. In 1967, I went to teachers' college, I wanted to become a teacher which was actually, for somebody who'd been school captain of Brisbane Grammar, was a bit of a departure, I don't think there'd ever been a school captain at Brisbane Grammar who wasn't a doctor or a lawyer or a corporate captain.

AS: You were supposed to be running the economy or the government, yeah?

DH: Yeah. And so, I went to teachers' college and thoroughly enjoyed that, I might add. But I still kept some contact with the University of Queensland and I remember I had a girlfriend who was at UQ and she was telling me that, oh look, in September of 1967, there was the march, the big civil liberties march into the city from the University of Queensland campus and she was saying oh, you've got to come along to this. And she was friends with all the sort of right wing Labor types on campus and the conservative students, and she was pretty conservative herself. And I thought, well, if she thinks it's okay, it's probably a pretty weak sort of affair - so I didn't bother going and I missed the most significant political action in Brisbane in decades. There was… 400 students get arrested in Roma Street and Jim Prentice, one of my friends who was

active on campus at the time, jokes with me that I missed the civil liberties rally in 1967 and I've been trying to make up for it ever since.

AS: Well, I think you have.

DH: Well, I've certainly stayed active ever since and stopping running was a big part of that. I got injured and I had to give away running. Then I came back to campus in 1972 to do my honours in history and that's when I, you know, I went from being just a grass roots activist who went along to rallies from time to time to being a full-time activist basically, after that. But I was involved in the anti-Springbok demonstrations in 1970, '71. That was a fairly seminal event for me.

AS: Just before you move on to the Springboks, the protest, just to return to the Vietnam War, how were students, radical students, understanding that conflict? Like how did they understand, firstly America's involvement and then why Australia went to war as well?

DH: Well, there were two aspects to it, to the involvement of radicals that I identified with. One was the imperialist interpretation of the war, analysis of the war, that it wasn't just a mistake on the American's part, that they really thought they were supporting a democratic government in Vietnam, but it turned out they weren't and what a terrible mistake and they had to get out. The radicals introduced the fact that this was an imperialist war, that it was part of a history of imperialism on the part of the Americans and there'd been many other efforts by them to suppress governments which weren't even necessarily communist, just governments which were opposed to United States vested interests in the area like Iran in 1953 or Guatemala in 1954 and then Chile in 1970, and Vietnam has to be seen in that light. I identified with that, I still think that that was the correct analysis.

The other one was the direct action against conscription mostly.

AS: Yes.

DH: I wasn't involved in any of that direct action, but I certainly agreed, you know, with, for example, the throwing of blood on the [floor of] the stock exchange that occurred in that period and I knew a number of the people who were involved in that and supported their action. So, yeah, the Vietnam War gave real life to the left, on campus and elsewhere. The one thing that I liked apart from the standard Noam Chomsky writings and various other writings from the time was the *Port Huron Statement*. It really clicked with me because that was a statement that was issued in 1961, I think it was, by the Students for Democratic Action in the United States and that was a real call on both the Right and the old Left to democratise, to take democracy as the key concept in political action. And political action being the key thing there, it wasn't, you know, instead of just debating ideas and putting out pamphlets and so on, that action was also required.

AS: Did the protests against the war also make you think that you were part of a global movement, a global challenge to an order, call it what you like, capitalism, imperialism, you must have been turning on the TV and there are people your age doing this in London and Paris and so on.

DH: Oh, it was wonderful. It was inspiring. The only trouble was that in 1968 when the students in Paris were rioting and the Tet Offensive was on and the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia, all these wonderful events were occurring, and the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1968. I was teaching in a little place called Injune out in Western Queensland and seeing it all on TV if I saw it at all. So, my heart was with

them, but my body was out in Western Queensland teaching kids. But yes, we did feel we were part of an international movement, we did feel that the world was changing, ’68 was the key year. I wanted to write a book about my life, I’ve never done it, but I wanted to write a book called the Long March of the Generation of ’68 and I think my generation of radicals has gone on that long march really. Many of us have never really given it away, given that idea away of a radical democratic world and action to achieve that.

AS: Another part, there were other large social movements of course at the time, there was the big power indigenous movement against injustice here, you can think about the Gorenje strike in the mid-60s and the Freedom Riders in central New South Wales. And there was also the women’s liberation movement, fighting for rights not only in broader society but it seems also within the Left. What was your understanding of those two movements at the time?

DH: They were highly… I wasn’t very active in those movements. I suppose the indigenous rights one, I have been, you know, over a period of time, I’ve been involved in it. I wasn’t involved at that early stage although I knew people like Sam Watson quite well and various other people who were. But for a boy coming from Western Queensland, all of this was pretty challenging. The anti-racism, anti-sexism, I was no different from a lot of country kids from that point of view and so there’s a lot of socialisation that I had to deal with, you know, socialisation issues I had to deal with. I can remember, I was married in ’68 - I got married very young. And my wife challenged me on a whole lot of my attitudes there and that was typical of the time. It was more than just simply a set of ideas that you agreed with, you had to be personally challenged a lot of the time to change your thinking, to properly change. So, I was pretty typical of my generation, I suspect in that. But nevertheless, it was important to have the person as political as well just sort of seeing problems with imperialism and problems with democracy writ large.

AS: But the Left rapidly developed an anti-racist perspective, a very militant anti-racist perspective.

DH: Certainly.

AS: Which it then took into the Springbok demonstrations.

DH: Yes.

AS: Were you part of those demonstrations in ’70, ’71?

DH: Yes, I was a grassroots activist in that period. I missed the, you know, in true spirit, I missed the most significant rally of the time.

AS: Because you must have been one of the only people not there, I’ve met so many people…

DH: Yeah, yeah, I was there in spirit but for some reason I missed the Tower Mill rally, probably fortunately, at the time I would have been beaten up. But I missed that, but I was there at the exhibition ground. That was a strange affair. I reckon every one of the students in my class at Grammar walked past me into the exhibition ground to see the match. I said what I thought of them at the time.

AS: Because you love your sport.

DH: Oh, yeah.

AS: So, was that an issue for you…

DH: Oh yeah, I would have loved to see the match.

AS: That we have to stop sport… the rugby, the cricket and so on in order for apartheid South Africa to be isolated, sport had to end?

DH; Yeah, sure. And I was unequivocal about that. I mean, but, you know, if it had been a team picked on merit rather than race, I would have gone to see it.

AS: Yep.

DH: But I remember I was standing next to another fellow who'd been to a private school like I had, and he was watching these people walk in and he saw one of his old school mates as I had, and he said, "Oh, g'day Jim!" Then he said, "G'day, (whatever his name was)." And then he suddenly realised that he'd been friendly to one of the guys walking in to see the match and he called out to him, "... you fascist!" (Laughing)

AS: Hello Jim - you fascist. (Laughing)

DH: Yeah, so it was important, and it was important to turn it back on Australians too, that as a lot of the aboriginal activists did, to say it's fair enough to be opposed to teams based on apartheid being protested against but you've also got to deal with the fact that there's pretty serious racism at home.

AS: Did radical students listen to that message?

DH: Oh, definitely. Yeah, yeah. And the big strike at university, on the university campus in 1970 was very much about that and those issues. People like Dan O'Neill and so on raised those issues all the time.

AS: And it seemed that a number of young people at the time, maybe including yourself, were moving towards Marxism and radical anarchism as a way to connect up the oppression of women and indigenous people, the war in Vietnam and the alienation that people felt in the workplace. I understand that you joined a group called the Self Management Group which was inspired, driven by Marxist and anarchist ideas, could you describe that time?

DH: Well, certainly. The '60s, towards the end of the '60s, I think right around the world and Brisbane was no different from that, there was the effort to try to understand what was going on here, what was the nature of a lot of these events and oppressions that we were experiencing, what were they caused by? And of course, there were Marxist ideas, Anarchist ideas, revolutionary ideas generally, third world revolutionary ideas started to emerge and become very influential. I taught political ideologies at university in later years and it seemed to me that my lessons were very much just a recap of what we used to talk about around refectory tables, you'd talk about John Stuart Mill or you'd talk about Lenin or you'd talk about Che Guevara around a table at the University of Queensland.

AS: But the SMG, the Self Management Group seemed to be particularly skilled at applying those Marxist ideas to what they saw in front of them. So, they spoke about the drudgery of study at university and …

DH: The Self Management Group was very much influenced by the French anarchists and I suppose the original impetus behind Students for Democratic Action, those sorts of radical democratic ideas and the person who was especially important in that was Brian Laver. Brian went over to Eastern Europe. I think he was actually, I might be wrong in this, but I think he was actually there as a young communist. It was a young communist conference anyway, a communist youth conference.

AS: Was he in the communist party at that …?

DH: I don't think Brian was ever in the communist party, but I think the communist party might have been …

AS: Trying to recruit him.

DH: Yeah, well certainly trying to recruit him and certainly, I think it might have helped him to go over there. But he was there in time for the '68 Prague Spring and he took part in that and his experience at the time and I think his reading at the time and the people that he spoke to influenced him greatly. He came back, and I don't think I've ever met a man who was more set in what he believed, you know. And what he believed was new, really, it was certainly not something that I'd come across before. It was, I mean, he called it libertarian communism or, we didn't use the word, libertarian socialism, didn't use the word anarchism all that much in the beginning. But he introduced me to the works of Erich Fromm, humanistic Marxist scholar, to certainly those unknown revolutions like Paris '68, you know, the Kronstadt Uprising in Russia, the Spanish Civil War, all of those sorts of anarchist movements. He was really important. Because he was so clear about his own position on those things and because he'd had a very credible period of time, the Queensland University, he'd been blacklisted by the university for his activities. You know, I had a lot of admiration for him.

And so, in that period, I taught at schools between '68 and '72 and so I didn't get much of a chance to talk to him. I used to go into the Red and Black Book Shop which he ran in that period and I'd have conversations with him. But because in those first few years of teaching, you really work hard when you're a teacher and you don't have a lot of time to spare. But in '72, I decided to go back to university, do my honours in history and I wasn't there long before I thought I'm not going to lose this chance, so I started getting involved in politics and the SMG, the Self Management Group, was just starting, just setting up, I think it had set up in late 1971. And I went into the Red and Black Bookshop and I spoke to Brian, I said, "I'm yours and I want to get involved".

AS: Yes, the number of people in the Self Management Group at that time, what do you estimate?

DH: Well, it was a very large organisation for an anarchist group. We would regularly get 60 people along to monthly meetings. Probably the number of people who were involved in one way or another, would have been in the hundreds. And we were well organised. Brian was a ferocious organiser. Not a good hands-on person but knew the value of organisation so we were organised into cells, so we would have an industrial cell, a high school cell, university cell, public sector cell, there were all, hospitals, a health cell, yeah, so they would be the, I suppose the branch meetings that you'd go to. And then we would have general meetings where everybody would come together to discuss policy issues or the campaigns that we were going to run.

AS: And the SMG was prolific in terms of producing these leaflets and the leaflets seemed to be very well written, they were funny and highly useful data. Can you comment on the production of those leaflets and how they were distributed?

DH: Well, I'm interested to hear that you thought that they were well produced because we used to just do them on typewriters because that's all we had in those days. So, you'd cut a stencil, you'd put it on a roneo machine and then you would just wind them out. And we used to think if you could see any white space on the leaflet, that you'd done, you were somehow, you know, you'd done a bad leaflet. We didn't take any effort with layout, we just tried to put as many words on the page as we could. The amazing thing was people used to read them! I couldn't get over that. Well, looking back on it, I can't get over it. Yeah, all the trouble you'd go to now to present some material to people to try to persuade them to read it. In those days, you'd see them squinting at something in order to get to the last line on the page. But you know, I can remember we put out a quarter of a million copies of one leaflet, one leaflet, quarter of a million.

AS: That's amazing. Yep.

DH: We'd put it out at factories, at the factory gates, at offices, at schools, at the university of course. Yeah, a quarter of a million went out. And we would be putting out a leaflet a week sometimes.

AS: And what was the theory behind distributing leaflets outside a factory gate? What was it about the workers in that gate that they were going to play some sort of role in transforming society?

DH: Most of it was generalised propaganda.

AS: Yep.

DH: But some of it would be aimed at a, well for example, a strike that was going on, the Evans Deakin shipyard I remember was one area where we were influential. So, you might put out a leaflet which commented on the strike and what should be done in terms of, you know, instead of the sort of bureaucratic leadership organisation of the strike by the union, making it more of a grassroots approach. And sometimes in the schools, we had, there was a fairly radical students movement back in those days, so we would recruit students to that sort of a movement that was going on, for more democracy in schools. So, yeah, it was fairly effective. If you look around now, at some of the people, well, over the last 20 years in particular, I suppose, some of the people who've come to the fore in the labour party or in community or one organisation or another. So, you look back on them and quite a few of them went through SMG at the time. They learnt their politics in SMG.

AS: And did you write some of those leaflets?

DH: Yeah, I wrote quite a few of the leaflets, yeah. We spent a lot of time in writing, putting our ideas out. Sometimes they weren't even on an issue, you know, sometimes you'd just, I can remember I wrote a leaflet once called *Is Meritocracy Enough?,* you know.

AS: Fair enough.

DH: Yeah, well it's a fair enough question to ask a philosophy class but I'm not sure it was a reasonable one to put out as a leaflet but, yeah. We'd put leaflets out on …

AS: That's an incredibly dynamic structure to have, the SMG at the time. But it dissolved in the early '70s.

DH: It did. It actually split into three, SMG. The one that I stayed with was, we called ourselves the Libertarian Socialist Organisation. It stayed as a fairly, somewhere between Marxism and anarchism I suppose, closer to anarchism than Marxism. But then what we would have called individualist anarchists went one way, the more lifestyle personal political approach. And then the third group went and joined the international socialists, so they adopted a sort of Marxist Trotskyist approach and the international socialists then went on, I suppose today would be the Socialist Alliance, I suppose. Sooner or later you'd find your way through a number of organisations to there. So, it was, really SMG only lasted 3 to 4 years. LSO, Libertarian Socialist Organisation continued from that but as a smaller organisation, that's where my involvement was. I was teaching all through that period and also, I started as a lecturer at teachers' college too, towards the end of the '70s.

But I started to become a bit disenchanted with anarchism on a number of issues. One was that, I can remember as a teacher, I thought that anarchism certainly was right to focus on the issue of democracy, but it failed, for me, in really identifying what the crucial role of the teacher was. As far as I was concerned, the teacher was a leader in the classroom and the person who structured learning, not just simply there to allow a free for all and I argued that very strongly inside the anarchists. I mean, we used to do things like setting up a café, we set up a café at one stage which was called Kropotkin's after the great anarchist Kropotkin, in West End and we used to have poetry nights and discussion nights and all sorts of things. It was really quite dynamic. The Labor Party used to put out the joke that, you know, "don't go along for a meal at Kropotkin's because anarchists don't take orders!" It was true. If they looked as though you could afford to pay for a meal they wouldn't get served! (Laughing)

But, yeah, we used to have these discussions and the law was another one. I used to argue the need for law, even though in a capitalist society, law is more often than not a tool for the ruling class, that nevertheless, it's a two-edged sword and a society without law is a society where the big fish with prevail and law was a way to preserve rights. And I still believe that, and I actually agreed with the Marxist historian E.P. Thompson on that. That law is a two-edge sword, it can be used by the ruling class, but it also can be used by ordinary people. And in my social movement activism, I've always taken that approach. That it's not just simply about grassroots mobilisation, important as all that is, you have to build on that in order to achieve good outcomes in terms of formalisation of those wins in law and, if need be, go and fight those things in court.

AS: I'd like to use E.P. Thompson to move on to another topic about the '70s. So, Thompson was a leading figure in the citizens for nuclear disarmament movement in Britain and in Queensland, had a very powerful anti-nuke movement and the movement seemed to carry with it, a critique of a global system that somehow required there to be nuclear weapons and nuclear power. And there was a placard at a rally that was quite interesting, it said, "Leave Uranium in the Ground and Bury Capitalism with It." You know, it says, well if you want to address this particular issue, you have to look at the entire economic context. Could you comment on that movement and that broader critique of capitalism that it contained?

DH: Well, that poster that you mentioned, "Leave Uranium in the Ground and Bury Capitalism with it!" was actually put out by my organisation, the Libertarian Socialist Organisation.

AS: Right, right.

DH: And around the '77, '78 anti-uranium demonstrations. So just like the whole ecology issue really, and E.P. Thompson would have agreed with this, I'm sure, although he

was quite an old man by the '80s. That it had sort of gone past capitalism, really, to a point where ruling elites around the world including the Soviet Union were engaged in a whole logic which, you know - infinite economic growth, perpetual economic growth, preparedness to build weapons that could blow us all up a dozen times over, those sorts of logics, he called exterminism, E.P. Thompson, that's the word he gave to it. I'm not sure whether it's a valid word or not. But, you know, it's a sort of logic that Naomi Klein, even today, would echo to some extent. You know, she'd say that it's disaster capitalism. You know, it's capitalism which is prepared to push the ecological and existential barriers to the absolute limit and that a people's movement has to do more than just simply take on capitalism or take on corporate power, it needs to take on that whole idea that we can have economic growth and believe that we can keep doing this forever.

AS: Well in this state, you know, a mine, the Adani Coal Mine, has been given approval by the state Labor government and it's estimated that about 4.7 billion tonnes of carbon will be released by that mine and we can witness ourselves, extreme weather events all around the world, there are communities in the South Pacific that have to abandon their homes, there's glacier ice in the Himalayas that's melting threatening water supply to people on the Ganges and the Mekong and yet our government's proceeding with it. Why do you think Queensland governments and Australian governments are so addicted to coal and fossil fuels?

DH: Well, we're in a period of time and we have been for several decades now, and I think, you know, those anti-uranium demonstrations back in the '70s really will have prefaced a lot of this because they started to take on a lot of that logic, that we can have infinite economic growth and we have it forever and we can experiment with all these really dangerous technologies like nuclear power. So, I think popular movements really started to take on that whole logic around about that time. And that's really coincided with my changing emphasis too, politically, in that I didn't see the anti-uranium movement as let's get rid of uranium and let's go back to coal because the renewables movement had just started up then, by the way, in the period after the 1973 oil crisis.

So, you know, a whole analysis and view of the future began to emerge around about that time. And as the anti-uranium movement, and let me diverge for just a minute there, the anti-uranium movement merged with a whole lot of others in Queensland because Queensland was such an authoritarian state, under Joh Bjelke-Petersen. And so, the anti-uranium movement merged with the civil liberties movement because you couldn't even have an anti-uranium rally and a march because the government refused to give us a march permit. So, from, I think it was the big '77 rally, people just walked out into the street for a march and just got arrested in their hundreds as a result of that.

So, you even had to have a civil liberties demonstration in order to raise issues like uranium mining and so the anti-uranium movement in Queensland was always dogged by that, by the fact that it could never just give a clear single focus, it always had to have a multi-focus. And of course, it morphed into the anti-nuclear movement by the early '80s. But 1980, I'd realised that and as far as I was concerned, anarchism had to be more than just simply monastic, you know, keeping the ideas alive. It had to be applied to real issues that people were feeling and the whole militarism issue, the whole ecological issue should be confronted with radical democratic ideas.

And so, I set up in 1980, I think it was, the War Resisters League which was loosely affiliated with the International War Resistance Movement, we weren't an official chapter, but we took the ideology from them which was a non-violent resistance ideology. It was anti-capitalist by implication, it was non-violent in its whole approach to action, but it was active. That's another issue I had with the anarchists, that for all

that we'd get involved in activity, it wasn't committed to grassroots and militant action and that's where I thought we needed to be because you need to have a political thrust which is not just simply about ideas, but it also embodies theatre, it embodies drama, it says to people we're here about something important and we're going to dramatize that for you as much as we can.

So, we started then doing things like going into the mall in town, which had just been set up, and trying to convert it into a people's mall rather than a shopper's mall so we'd have forums in there on Friday nights and we'd go in and we'd set up a milk crate, Keiren or Riley or I would hop up on the milk crate and we'd start speaking away and try to get in as much as we could before the coppers came and arrested us. And we'd have hundreds of people there at these things, coming along to hear us. I remember one time there in 1983, the police were used to us coming in on Friday nights so of course I'd come into the mall and I'd be immediately surrounded by half a dozen police. Even if I went into the mall at lunch time to do some shopping, I'd be surrounded by police.

AS: You'd have a police escort.

DH: I did. And I'd have a police sergeant behind me saying, "don't you walk against the Don't Walk sign now, Mr Hutton". And so, anyway, we were there this Friday night and I was surrounded by coppers and somebody did a distraction, "Oh! There's something happening at the other end of the mall!". So all of a sudden, these six plain clothes police left my side to go rushing up the other end of the mall and I took the opportunity to jump up to this Leopard Tree in the middle of the mall and some friends who were there immediately wrapped a chain around me and locked me on. I gave the key to somebody and they took it. Anyway, the police came back, and we weren't quite sure what they were going to do. I made sure that there was somebody close by with a key in case I had a couple of old right-wing coppers who wanted to beat the crap out of me which they did, they'd do from time to time. But anyway, a couple of young coppers came back, and they said, "Come on, get down from there" and I said, "I can't, I'm locked in", and they laughed so, I figured I didn't need the key, I wasn't going to get belted. They said, "what did you do with the key?", I said "I swallowed it". They laughed, and I was alright. So, I spoke there for 40 minutes. I actually ran out of breath before they, they couldn't find any bolt cutters, and finally somebody found a pair of bolt cutters and cut me out.

AS: In the end, did you win that campaign?

DH: Yeah, we did, actually.

AS: Yeah, right.

DH: Yeah, yeah.

AS: It seems to be something you have to win again and again because currently it's unlawful to speak in the mall.

DH: Well, just on that by the way, on that night, I got thrown into a paddy wagon and anyway, I was sitting there felling pretty happy with how things went, and a lawyer came in, he came into the paddy wagon in his seat and it was Noel Noonan and Noel became a magistrate later on, I think he still is. And I said to him, "Oh, go away Noel, I don't need a lawyer, I know what I'm doing." He said "I'm not here as a lawyer, I just got arrested." He was going across the mall to dinner with some friends and he said, "What's going on?" and somebody said "oh Drew Hutton just got arrested for

speaking." And he said "Oh, this is a police state isn't it?" He got arrested and thrown in.

AS: For saying that?

DH: For saying that, yeah. Yeah. Oh, we had people arrested for, one of the things we used to do was put a *Made in Queensland* sticker, if the police told us to stop doing what we were doing, we'd put a *Made in Queensland* sticker across our mouth and one of our, Greg George, one of my mates did this and he got arrested for miming in the mall, that was on his arrest sheet, 'miming in the mall'.

AS: That's a criminal matter, miming?

DH: That was a criminal, yeah, yeah. He's still got it up on his wall I think, that arrest sheet. But we won it later on under Jim Soorley as the Mayor because it was actually a council by-law which was enshrined in the state law, but it actually started as a by-law first of all. And we negotiated with Jim Soorley that we could do it in certain parts of the mall. So, yeah, it won in the end. But we won then anyway because we just coming back, and the police just got sick of arresting us. So, de-facto we won and then Jim enshrined it later on.

AS: Many people, when they think of your name, they think of you as one of the founders of Queensland Greens. Now that's a very interesting journey to go from anarchists to Marxists groups in the 60s and 70s through the anti-nuke and earlier ecology movement in the 70s to founding a parliamentary party of reform. Do you see that as a retreat from the broad critique of capitalism and the militant response that flowed from it – or do you see it as a different way to create deep structural reform?

DH: Well, I've never stopped believing in deep structural reform, but I wouldn't call myself a revolutionary. I stopped being a revolutionary in the early 80s and that was the final reason why I left the anarchists, because I thought far more effort needed to go into how you would make the transition to the deep structural reforms that you needed and I also thought that you needed at least some level of represented democracy, that you couldn't do it all through participatory democracy and that in any sort of complex society, in order to make sure that you didn't have some areas of privilege and some areas of poverty and so on which you would get out of the radical decentralisation. That in order to protect people's rights, you needed that sort of degree of centralisation. And so, I was inspired by the German Greens, people who I'd always had a lot of time for [and] although I never met him, Danny Cohn-Bendit, the great French anarchist. And he joined the Greens fairly early on and I thought well, it's good enough for a good French anarchist like, a German anarchist like Danny Cohn-Bendit, that's good enough for me.

So, I got together a group of new leftists basically, people I'd known from the old days and were they interested in setting up a Greens. It's interesting that, I think the time had passed for most people. By the 80s, by the early 80s, I think most of those people were either too influenced by traditional leftism and revolutionary politics or they just got too old to try something new like this. But the ones who did, who were interested were people from the anti-nuclear movement and the younger new leftists.

AS: When you think of people like Jeremy Corbyn and Sanders in the United States, do you think they're enacting or fulfilling that vision that you had of the Australian Greens in the 1980s where you seem to have political figures who had behind them almost what you'd describe as a genuine mass movement, that have rallied around some key points of reform and that the two things seem to have to work hand in hand like the

movement within parliament, those initiatives but sustaining that grassroots movement out in the streets and the workplaces. Is that something that you relate to?

DH: Oh, I relate to it, very much so. I think both the Corbyn and Sanders phenomena are very hopeful. They're different from what I tried to do with the Greens in that I saw, the Greens explicitly came out of an environmental imperative and it was a political response to the destruction of the environment at a global level but recognised that the social justice and other considerations needed to be taken on as well. If you're going to make the transition to a sustainable society, you have to take on board those arguments, so that's where I was coming from. And because I'd had that background in radical democratic politics and revolutionary politics, it was easy for me to do that. And I think a lot of the people that came with me at the time, it was easy for them to do it too. And so, the Greens have maintained that social justice orientation that's been there from day one.

Corbyn and Sanders are coming from the other direction. They're saying social justice and the sort of opposition to the corporate model is where they're coming from and you have to take on the environmental arguments at the same time. And so, it's really one, I suspect it's one of emphasis, I don't think there's a lot of difference between them. And to a large extent, it depends on the electoral system that you have. So, it's a pragmatic decision. I made the pragmatic decision that in Australia, there was enough proportional representation in the electoral system for a separate Green party to get leverage. There isn't that in the American system except at the local levels, and in the UK it's very difficult as well. You know, it's first past the post, it's very difficult for a third party to get up and get enough votes to get into the House of Commons. So, in Germany on the other hand, they have a proportional system and consequently, the Greens have been in government in Germany, at one stage. So, yeah, it was a pragmatic decision really. It was based on where we were coming from which was radical ecology and also the electoral system which enabled a minority political strand to gain political leverage.

AS: Have you always been happy with the balance that the Greens have struck between parliamentary activity and preparing for an election and remaining involved in those campaigns for social justice, trade union movement to some extent, the ecology.

DH: Oh, yes, I am. And what a lot of, I've always had a foot in both camps but I'm a little bit different to most Green party people in that, but I've always been of the view that it's a political party, you know, don't be naive about it, it's a political party, it'll act as a political party. It'll make pragmatic decisions if it has to. But it clearly has close links with social movements, clearly, you know, it's got to have those otherwise it just dies on the vine as an opportunist party. But a lot of my cohorts, in for example, Lock the Gate, that I've been involved in in recent years. They say, "Oh, those bloody Greens, you know. They shouldn't be going out and showboating on this, we want to go a bit quiet on this." Well, I say, you know, they're a political party. You've got to accept they're a political party, they'll operate on a slightly different imperative to what a social movement will, and you can call them opportunists or whatever you like but they will be opportunistic, and they will be pragmatic. You would hope that if they stray too far from being radical, that they'll be renovated, that there will be people coming in and saying, "No, this is the wrong track", you know, "we've got to kick those people out", and other people will come in.

But that's the dynamic that occurs. It doesn't just occur in political parties, it occurs in social movements as well. You know, we've had an environment movement in this country now for 30 years which has been asleep. You know, they were asleep until Lock the Gate came along and reminded them that there's this thing called non-violent

direct action, you know, that you could actually go back to the grassroots. You could even go to constituencies that have never been mobilised before by the environment movement - like farmers. You know, they thought that some of these NGOs think that radical political action is meeting with a bureaucrat every six weeks or meeting with a minister twice a year.

AS: Taking a selfie.

DH: And doing a selfie, that's right! Yeah, so, you know, I'm not of the view, I'm not a revolutionary, I don't think there's going to be a revolution that immediately changes everything, and everything is going to be wonderful after that. There's going to be breakthroughs, there's going to be changes, there's going to be steps backwards and what's going to be consistent is that people will fight.

AS: Yes.

DH: You know, that there's always in people, the need to control their own destinies and to feel that they're community has control over their destinies and that they will fight oppression and that you'll always have people that want to oppress, you'll always have people that want to screw other people. So, you know, I'll always be on the side of the people who are oppressed, and I will always fight those people who think that you can screw other people, or you can screw the environment to make yourself rich and powerful. You know, if I see policemen bashing up workers, I don't have to ask twice whose side I'm on.

AS: No.

DH: You know, I know I'm on that side, I'm on the side of the people who are opposing tyranny and I'll be like that until the day I die.

AS: Well, it seems in many ways, your recent activism in Lock the Gate has been a return to that more radical period of the 60s and 70s. I mean, it's not 'shut the gate' or 'close it', it's 'lock it', you know, it's to take a very definite uncompromising stand against the fossil fuel industry and the remarkable thing that I understand is that you've been winning, there have been victories across Australia against coal seam gas.

DH: Oh, and that's really important for me. That it's not, what is no longer important for me is the great victory, the one big victory that we'll have. What's important for me is that we start getting outcomes here and now and that those outcomes build on each other so we'll have breakthroughs, you know, we'll defeat the fossil fuel industry, it will be defeated. It'll be defeated in the next decade basically and it won't be just one giant thing that happens. We've started the process already, you know, we've closed down coal seam gas in many parts of Australia.

AS: Yep.

DH: We'll close down coal mining. You know, at the same time, new technology will come through and then the question will be who controls that technology.

AS: Yes.

DH: You know, so there's always fights to have. There's always real arguments to go backwards and forwards and hopefully that liberatory element will always be there and people will fight for a just society.

AS: Alright, one final question and that's, there's a new generation of young people who are questioning our society just as you did when you moved from Grammar into university and they're seeing a world where it's difficult to get work, that humanity faces an existential crisis in terms of climate change, that nuclear war once again seems to be back in people's minds and yet there are victories. What's your advice to a young person asking big questions about the direction of their society?

DH: Well, two things I suppose. One is to talk to other people, especially talk to older activists. That's what I did. That's what people like Brian Laver did, they went back to the old activists and said, "How did you do it?" You know, "I don't particularly want to do it that way, I want to do it this way, but I can learn from what you did". And so, I think that my generation of activists does have something to tell the millenialists of today, not that I want to see them do what we did, they'll do it their own way. So, one of the problems is that each generation has to learn again, it's just not moving on in a linear fashion to a bigger and better world, they really do have to learn things again and that's why it's important to talk to the older activists. But, you know, I've left Lock the Gate now, I've got bad health and I can't do what I did in it and the same with the Greens, I can't do what I did originally with the Greens. And I can't do something half-hearted but I always think it's important to pass on to another generation and so I'm really pleased to see that happening in both the two big areas of my life which are the organisations I've built which are the Greens and Lock the Gate. But new younger people are coming through and it's important that the handover be achieved, you know, that what I've done gets handed across to younger people who can now carry that torch. And thankfully, I'm seeing a whole new generation of people who are doing just that.

AS: Well thanks for your time today. It's been a privilege talking to you.

DH: Thank you.