



Teachers, parents and school children protest against proposed school closures, 21 October, Melbourne

## Right to protest under threat

*La Trobe University Students' Representative Council President Jane Kemelfield faces serious criminal charges over an occupation of the university administration building in August 1995, with repercussions for all political and union activists.*

Jane is alleged to have briefly addressed the crowd outside the building before the sit-in. On this basis alone, she has been charged with 'incitement' and with 'criminal damage' caused by others in the crowd to some doors and a table. The maximum penalty for each offence is seven-and-a-half year's jail. In a protest over SRC funding, students pushed their way into the administration building and staged a peaceful sit-in. The occupation was a result of the La Trobe University management's decision to withhold SRC funding, and led successfully to the restoration of the funding.

If Jane is found guilty of the incitement charge, it would

be a dangerous precedent which would mean that unionists and activists could face charges after any rally, protest or meeting, simply for speaking at it or advocating a course of action, such as pickets, rallies or strikes. This precedent could be fatal to union and community activism.

The police say Chief Commissioner Neil Comrie is taking a personal interest in Jane's case.

Jane's case is being heard at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court, corner Lonsdale and William Streets in the city, on 10 December. A rally in Jane's support starts at 9.30 am. Defend your right to protest!

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