

4ZZZ: learning the hard way

by Nathan Laurent

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BRISBANE — On December 8, the independent radio station, 4ZZZ FM celebrated 20 years on air. Marked by special programs and live performances (including an appearance by Jello Biafra), it was a reminder that the alternative media is a vital community resource.

Community stations like ZZZ were set up under the Whitlam government to encourage diversification of media ownership and to pioneer FM broadcasting. Once ZZZ had 13 full-time paid staff-members, but when the Fraser and Hawke governments slashed its budget, 4ZZZ became increasingly dependent on subscriptions and fundraising. Hit with the high costs of technical maintenance and changing studio locations twice, ZZZ has earned the label "non-profit organisation" the hard way.

The station was originally based at the University of Queensland, and as the hub of campus culture and politics, it attracted funding from the Student Union. When Young National Party member Victoria Brazil became president of the Union in December 1988, ZZZ's funding was cut and forcibly closed down. Within hours of its closure a defence campaign was organised, and up to 300 people at a time occupied the station over the next two weeks.

Since ZZZ moved off-campus, it has reached a broader audience, including youth. Of the 2500 current subscribers, 24% are 15-18 years-old, and 40% are 19-25 years-old. Its programs include Megahertz (women's politics and music), Queer Radio/Lesbian Show, Peace and Environment Show, Prisoner's Program, and The Anarchist Show. During the 1980s, Solidarity Radio played an important role in supporting the SEQEB dispute, and Radio Latin America gave migrants and solidarity activists a voice. 4AAA, Murri Radio (now an independent station) grew out of the regular Murri Hour on ZZZ.

ZZZ journalists were the first to expose the Bjelke-Petersen government's police raids on communes at Cedar Bay in 1981, the riots at Boggo Road jail and Aboriginal protests against the Commonwealth Games in 1982.

Since Goss Labor took over government, the need to speak out has not diminished. It's inaction on abortion, cannabis laws reform, the environment and Aboriginal deaths in custody has prompted ZZZ to publicise and sponsor rallies and conferences. Brendan Greenhill, who produces "Locked In", a jail and justice program which goes to seven community radio stations nationally each week, told *Green Left Weekly* that the reporting of DSS' harassment of AIDEX protesters, the eviction of squatters in West End, the free speech campaign and plans for a toxic waste dump at Esk have been among ZZZ's recent important contributions. Greenhill also said that "ZZZ has a real internationalist outlook", relying on regular correspondents from around the world as well as the Internet. This is expressed by 4ZZZ's strong support for campaigns against nuclear testing, for independence for Bougainville and East Timor, and for democracy in Indonesia.

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