

The SUPRA

International students – still being subjected to racist exploitation

In Melbourne last week some 250 students from a number of universities and higher education institutes came out to rally against the Victorian state government's policy of denying international students and postgraduate students access to transport concessions.

This rally builds on a campaign conducted by SUPRA's Melbourne University counterpart, the Melbourne University Graduate Students' Association (GSA). The GSA has been working with a number of student groups including the Federation of Indian Students Australia, Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia Australia, and the national peak body for postgraduate students, the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA). The GSA also built relationships with the International Student Advisers Network Australia, and the Victorian branch of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union to get their campaign off the ground.

So far the Melbourne students have put together a petition with 5000 signatures, including that of the Melbourne University Vice-Chancellor, Glyn Davis, and those of the University Council (equivalent to our Senate). They have also received public support from Greens MLCs in presenting their petition to the Victorian parliament before the state budget is handed down this month.

As I spoke to Paul Coats, president of the Melbourne University GSA today, he was optimistic about the

campaign. "There is a long way to go, but people are feeling optimistic about the campaign, and I think the rally was successful," he said.

The basis for the campaign in Melbourne is similar to that in Sydney – NSW and Victoria are the two states in the country which make it legal to discriminate against international students in providing public transport concessions. NSW and Victoria also have high numbers of international students who pay high fees and taxes, but who are denied the basic entitlements that other students expect.

I call this situation exploitative and racist. In 2006 SUPRA ran a campaign for international students to gain transport rights through the Anti-Discrimination Board and the Administrative Decisions Tribunal. Both the ADB and ADT found that the NSW government was unlawfully discriminating against international students by denying them travel rights. The NSW government responded by changing the Anti-Discrimination Act to allow them to discriminate against international students. This illustrates the extreme measures that governments will go to in order to squeeze every cent they can from international students.

Earlier this month it was revealed that up to 60 businesses have been investigated in relation to migration fraud towards international students. A number of private colleges and training institutes

are under investigation for providing fraudulent education certificates and work references, and charging up to \$20,000.

SUPRA has also received a number of reports of fraudulent real estate providers targeting international students. Properties which either do not exist, or are extremely sub-standard are advertised at unrealistic rental rates, and international students have been defrauded of thousands of dollars.

It seems the NSW and Victorian state governments are happy to operate like these ruthless criminals, with the only difference being their ability to change the law to make their actions unassailable.

Rashmi Kumar
SUPRA President
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In response to student enquiries, SUPRA is beginning to organise around international students' transport concessions once again. The first meeting was last week, and the next meeting to discuss and plan the campaign will be on Tuesday 12th May, 12 pm, location TBA.

National Plan of Action to 'Reduce' Violence Against Women

Further to the article from last week about the government's recalcitrance over the National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women, the Minister for Women, Tanya Plibersek has revealed the National Plan of Action (NPoA) this week.

The funding largely goes towards the establishment of a national telephone and online help line staffed by professionals (unlike the 'Australia Says No' help line), at \$12.5 million, and \$26 million going towards a 'Respectful Relationships' education strategy targeted at a number of primary schools in regional and remote areas, as well as a national co-ordinated legislative strategy.

While these initiatives are not, in themselves, harmful, we must look at them in the broader context of the issue.

The NSW Women's Refuge Resource Centre revealed that almost one in two women are turned away from refuges because of a lack of resources. The statistic is often cited, but nothing is being done to address the severe lack of accommodation available to women in crisis in the NPoA.

Moreover, a number of the 'Respectful Relationships' education strategies are being targeted at 15 remote community schools in the Northern Territory. As the NPoA unequivocally and uncritically supports the government's Intervention into these communities (the Northern Territory Emergency Response), which has seen a worsening of child health, loss of income, and the collapse of community services (especially those which assist women in crisis), it is merely advocating the shuffling of money from one department to another. It begs the

question: if children in remote Aboriginal communities are going to be educated about violence against women, where will they go for help if all the services have been shut down?

The NPoA's focus on public awareness-raising comes at the cost of real services for people in need, and is another attempt at back-patting and self-justification from the Rudd government.

Rashmi Kumar
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** SUPRA Queer Film Night **

What's on: *The Secret History of Queer Australia*
When: Friday 15 May, 6pm – 8:30pm
Where: SUPRA Office, in the Raglan Street building
Cost: FREE!
Food & drinks provided!

So head on down to the SUPRA Office on Friday 15th May ... bring a buddy!
We'll be expecting you!

Postgrad Pages

Are you being told by your landlord you can't put things in the fridge? Or just had a knock on the door at 3 am? Or have you been threatened that deductions will be made from your rental bond if you use the Internet? Maybe it means you've got the landlord from hell!

It is now more than half way through the semester and many postgraduates will be realising that their living conditions and who they live with or are renting from is having an impact on them and their ability to study at home. If you don't feel comfortable in the place where you live, eat and sleep and find you are delaying going home to your flat/household/bedroom then something is happening that is not healthy for you.

Ways you can try to resolve your living situation

(a) Talk with your landlord or real estate agent

Whether it is a problem with the locks on the doors and windows, or getting a repair done, or some other problem there are often provisions in the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* which can be referred to when you approach your landlord or agent to talk to about the situation. Make sure you read information available on the website of the Tenants' Union of NSW (contact info is below) and, preferably, call the Tenants' Unions Tenancy Advisory Hotline for advice first BEFORE you talk with your landlord or real estate agent.

(b) If talking doesn't work and you are left with empty promises

It is not acceptable that repairs are left undone by a landlord or agent, it is not acceptable if you are being lied to, and it is not acceptable behavior if a landlord then turns around because you have raised an issue with them and they threaten you.

If it has become evident that the response you have received is not going to result in something actually being done about the situation (e.g. fix the locks, make the repair, reduce the rent until the repair is done, whatever the issue is) then it is time to get tough. Your options are:

- Write a letter about the situation to your landlord/agent and request that the matter be rectified by a particular date. You can specify a date by which you feel the situation should be rectified but you will need to go back to the TU Hotline to double check what is a reasonable time to specify. The *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* frequently uses the phrase 'reasonable' so it is important to discuss your situation with an advisor to get an idea of what is generally considered 'reasonable' in the particular situation you are facing.
- You can make an application to the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal (CTTT) for assistance in resolving

the matter. Apply to the Tenancy Division if you are covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987* or to the General Division if the contract you have signed is not covered by the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987*. If you decide to apply to the do seek assistance prior to lodging the documents with the CTTT.

(c) If talking hasn't work and you have been left with threats from your landlord or agent

Threatening behavior by a landlord or agent is unacceptable, however, unfortunately it does happen. The types of threats which students have reported to us that they have received are:

- I'll deduct money from your bond
- You cannot cook in the kitchen
- You cannot use the internet or I will charge you more because someone has downloaded too much from the internet
- It was your fault that your iPod/Xbox 360/computer/ etc was stolen from your bedroom and I am not responsible.

All of the above are unacceptable and you can do something about them. What can be done varies according to the situation you are in. Come to SUPRA for assistance or go to your local tenancy service for support.

Our experience at SUPRA is that, if you do something about whatever has been happening with your accommodation (from writing a formal letter to applying to the CTTT) it can do result in the student getting some or all of what they want.

Where to go for further assistance:

- website of Tenants' Union of NSW www.tenants.org.au
- Tenants Hotline: (02) 8117 3750 or 1800 251 101
- phone or make an appointment to see a tenancy advisor at your nearest tenancy advisory and advocacy service (see website of Tenants' Union of NSW for the list of these services);
- website of Department of Fair Trading www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au (select 'Tenants and Home Owners' option; or phone Renting Services (relevant section of the Dept of Fair Trading) on 13 3220;
- website of SUPRA www.supra.usyd.edu.au
- make an appointment to see a Student Advice and Advocacy Officer at SUPRA.

Subscribe to SUPRA it's FREE!

By becoming a SUPRA Subscriber you will be able to:

- Access our free, confidential student advice and advocacy service
- Participate in SUPRA events and activities
- Receive regular email updates and electronic publications (eGrad)
- Use the SUPRA Resource and Meeting Rooms
- Access discounted photocopying, printing and faxing
- Vote or run in the SUPRA Council elections
- Actively participate in your representative student association.

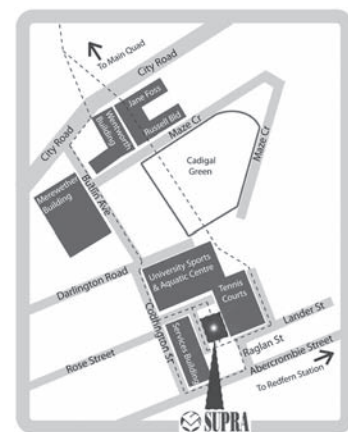
By becoming a SUPRA Supporter you will be able to:

- Access all of the above benefits
- Receive a SUPRA Supporter Welcome Pack (including SUPRA highlighter and t-shirt)
- Show that you appreciate the value of an independent student run organisation.

Complete your subscription online at www.supra.usyd.edu.au/subscribe then follow the links if you would like to become a SUPRA Supporter. Alternatively you can complete a form at our stalls or drop into the SUPRA office.



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What's coming up at SUPRA (see www.supra.usyd.edu.au for more information)

NOW	Nominations now open for the 2009-2010 SUPRA Council. For details see www.supra.usyd.edu.au
Tues 12 May, 12pm	International Students Meeting, location to be advised
Fri 15 May, 6-8.30pm	SUPRA Queer Film Night 'The Secret History of Queer Australia' @ SUPRA Office