

# Soft power: hard sell

“Speak softly and carry a big stick”  
US President Theodore Roosevelt, 1903

Tonight we commemorate the 158<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Eureka Stockade. We are also sixty-three years away from the 1949 feature film about ‘our own little rebellion’. Chips Rafferty played Peter Lalor. The director was the Englishman Harry Watt. He had been seconded to the Australian government to improve British appreciation of Australia’s war effort. He stayed on to establish a production unit for Ealing Studios.

Watt’s first achievement had been *The Overlanders* (1946) about a war-time cattle drive from the north-west into Queensland. His progressive outlook is clear from his presenting the heroine as a skilled drover. She is far from mere romantic relief. Even more striking is how the Aboriginal stockmen – and women – are shown. They are essential to the success of the 3,000 km. ordeal. Watt is but one example of how ‘New Chums’ contribute to radical nationalism.

*Eureka Stockade* opens with a declaration which echoes the Eureka oath: ‘The story of the world is the story of man’s fight for freedom.’ That fight has many faces: political, economic and cultural. Tonight I shall reflect on one strand of the cultural, namely, film and television. We shall see that more is at stake than supporting local talent, valuable as that is. The fate of screen culture reveals the dynamics of capital. The foreign producers dominated through cartels over distribution. That connection confirms oligopoly as the core of imperialism. Of late, the term ‘soft power’ has gained prominence. We have long known that form of manipulation as cultural imperialism.

## The storyboard

Screen culture is yet another thread in our experience that is not as well known as it deserves to be. The world’s first full-length feature was produced here in 1906, *The Story of the Kelly Gang*. Shortly afterwards, the NSW police banned bushranger films because they showed wallopers in a bad light. At the same time, the theatre owners set up a cartel. Despite the influx of British and US product, Australian producers and actors kept up a stream of movies throughout the silent era. Louise Lovely, Lotte Lyell and the three McDonagh sisters were among the successful directors. The women are not as well remembered as Charles Chauvel, Ken Hall, Frank Hurley, Raymond Longford and Frank Thring snr. However, they all had to push back as Hollywood excluded local films by controlling the cinemas. A Royal Commission reported in 1928 but had no impact against the overlaps between a locally-based combine and the U.S. American ‘octopus’.

By 1918, Australians had released 161 films. In the 1920s, there were ninety-six more. The arrival of talkies added to the difficulties by increasing the cost. Thus, during the 1930s only fifty appeared. Between 1940 and 1964 there were forty-five – not quite two a year. Before the arrival of television in 1956, Hollywood had strangled Australian screen production. Most of the films that did get made were UK or US productions, often with imported stars. Ernest Borgnine

led the cast of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. Jimmy Little featured in *Shadow of the Boomerang* in 1960 for the Billy Graham Crusade. I have to say that it was far from the worst of the crop. A slow improvement took place in the late 1960s before the revival around 1970.

Between 1963 and 1968, only six features had been shot here. The most significant turned out to be *They're a Weird Mob* in 1966. Another progressive Briton, Michael Powell, directed Italian star Walter Chiari as 'Nino Culotta'. The story told a lot about work on building sites. The movie earned \$2.5m. for the distributors. The producers did not get their money back until 1974. One of them remarked that it was 'a very poor return for the grower of the vegetable.' However, box-office success sparked a movement to fund a local industry. One result was the South Australian Film Commission in 1974.

Numbers tell only part of the story. The fewer films there are, the less chance there is of achieving quality. And the fewer prospects there are for progressive directors such as New Zealand-born Cecil Holmes. His *Captain Thunderbolt* (1953) portrayed the bushrangers as primitive rebels. Holmes next drew on the social realist tradition to direct *Three in One* (1957). He had support from the documentary makers around the Film Unit sponsored by the Waterside Workers Federation between 1953 and 1958.

Documentaries merit as much attention as do our features. Shell Oil financed *The Back of Beyond* (1954) which follows the postie along the Birdsville Track. He makes sure the mails get through flood and sandstorm. The Commonwealth Department of Immigration Film Unit commissioned *Mike and Stephanie* (1952). The idea was to convince audiences that Displaced Persons were not getting a easy ride into Australia. The reality of the selection process that was so grim that the film was not released. The government feared a backlash because of the harshness of its policies. Today's equivalent might be *Go back to where you came from*.

The Commonwealth Film Board/Unit was a refuge for all manner of unorthodox talents throughout its fifty years from 1946. It provided a training ground for technicians before there were Film Schools.

Most of these stories made it to our screens because of government support. From several angles, one essential for local creativity has been funding and protections. In the first decades of television, the law required that all commercials be made here. One result was training for technicians. That opportunity was important because the budget for a thirty-second advert was at least as large as for the thirty-minute local dramas.

Similarly, most Australians got access to non-English speaking movies because of the tax-funded SBS. There was never enough profit for the oligopolies that regulate the free market. It was the cultural nationalists who made it possible for Australians to see worlds beyond Hollywood. Opening our screens to local creativity has always been promoted by people who also championed films from the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe or Japan.

### Two cheers

The call to reawaken a cultural nationalism confronts us with questions about how to proceed. Should we go to the other extreme of saying that every movie made here is the best in the world? I hardly think so. Let's go back to film history to see why not. In my judgement, some of the finest 500 films ever shot come

from here. I would nominate two silents, *The Sentimental Bloke* (1919) and *The Kid Stakes* (1927). By way of contrast, my list includes the balletic *Mad Max II* (1981) and the comedic *Ten Canoes* (2006). I doubt that any of these four deserves to be in the Top Ten. They merit consideration for a top 100. Indeed, *Empire* put *Ten Canoes* up there in 2010.

If we have several contenders, we also are in the running for some of the all-time turkeys. History will draw a veil over most of schlock horrors generated by the tax racket known as 10BA in the late 1970s. Producers churned out trash in a bottom-of-the-harbor scheme to get tax write-offs from investing in local output. Some of the films have never been screened. A few were never supposed to be shown. The scheme was the Fraser regime's answer to the socialist Film Corporations. The result of 10BA was market failure in terms of quality. It was a triumph for market forces by stuffing scumbags with tax-funded subsidies.

Although those flopperoots are worthless as film they hold a significance for us. Equally awful movies from Brazil or Bollywood can never provide the same lessons for us. We can learn much more from our own mistakes than from those of other peoples.

The principle of relevance applies also to the admirable local works that don't qualify for the top 500. *Strictly Ballroom* (1992) is a delight. People anywhere can appreciate the generational conflict. Its multicultural dimension speaks more directly to Australians. At the opposite end of the emotional register is *Wake in Fright* (1971). Nothing from anywhere else hits the Australian solar plexus so hard.

For my money, the two greatest all-time movies are D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916) and Abel Gance's *Napoleon* (1927). No Australian director betters Eisenstein or Bunuel or Ozu. Nothing in my cultural nationalism is embarrassed by acknowledging that the very best has been made overseas. Rather, we should be embarrassed to pretend that we have done things we can't. If we go down that track we miss out on learning how to reach for what no local film has so far managed. Two exemplars to which our film-makers should aspire are *The Battle of Algiers* (1965) and the documentary *Harlan Country USA* (1971).

Not even that pair provides answers. All films from the mediocre to the stunning, provoke questions. *The Sapphires* is another delight to watch and listen to. But it cannot be any kind of answer to income management or deaths in custody. To chastise its makers for not solving such problems is to confuse art with activism. A movie can encourage us to struggle. It cannot tell us when to strike.

*The Sapphires* leaves us with more than enough questions to discuss. It can cast a light on some continuing disasters. It cannot ride to the rescue. However, like *Jedda* (1955), it does provide a point of departure for interrogating our experience. No film from elsewhere can deliver those connections. *Dreamgirls* (2006) is inspired by the Supremes and tells a parallel story. We can hear that the US group was musically superior to the locals. But Australians need *The Sapphires* to penetrate to the particulars of our time and our place. *Dreamgirls* adds value as a contrast. It highlights the differences between racism in an erstwhile slave economy and one which has rarely depended on the non-white labour-force.

### Trading freedom

Many of the Australian movies and television series that we love have depended on government funding. Such arrangements are now under threat. The most obvious danger comes from the Pacific Trade Partnership. The Hollywood monopolisers want to end quotas for Australian content on television and subsidies for production. Those supports are deemed unfair competition, restrictions on trade.

Two related challenges appear technical. The first to hit will be the switch to digital-only television from 2013. This change imposes costs on local producers. The ALP government is sitting on a report about providing assistance. A greater danger comes from by the National Broadband Network – if it ever works. The government has budgeted \$40 billion for access to content from anywhere. In that situation, quotas for Australian production lose all meaning. The Screen Producers Association is asking why one billion is not being set aside to sustain local creative teams.

Our screens carry advertisements pleading with viewers not to download material illegally. Don't burn our screen culture, is the cry. That campaign is fair enough. However, it misses the real enemy. The cookie-monster is not the free-loader at home in the suburbs. The blood-suckers are the likes of Apple, Mass Murdoch and Microsoft.

Another anniversary in 2012 is for the election of Australia's last Labor government. Since 1983, there have been ALP governments but no 'labour' ones. ALP is now short for Anti-labour-Party. Back then, the arrival of a mildly social democratic administration was enough for the US imperium to send Marshall Green to Canberra as Ambassador. Seven years earlier, he had overseen the slaughter of half-a-million Leftists in Indonesia.

This career diplomat was not the only agent to arrive. From Hollywood came the head of the U.S. Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association, Jack Valenti. Valenti's prime task was to protect profit. Late in the 1970s, he told the US Senate that the VCR was no different from the Boston Strangler. He feared the loss of advertising revenue from that recorder. Meanwhile, studios made money out of the serial-killer genre. Hollywood had long been a serial killer of other screen cultures. Valenti came from a long line of enforcers. In the late 1940s, Marshall Aid made the French give up their quotas for screening foreign films.

The studios have to sell in bulk to maintain a rate of return. By itself, the Australian market does not amount to much. Yet the sale of television re-runs to Packer's Nine Network contributed to Hollywood's absolute earnings. Moreover, Valenti had to pre-empt a demonstration effect. If the Australians lifted the quotas for local content and expanded subsidies for production, other governments might follow suit. Canberra was moving for a nation-wide Film Commission.

Moreover, profit-taking needs propagandists. Capitalist ideology works best when it is indirect. Disney had Donald Duck squawk anti-communist stuff at kids across Latin America. Dorfman and Mattelart document that Cold War effort in *How to Read Donald Duck* (1975).

In the long-term, indoctrination is most effective when capitalism is glossed in musicals and sit-coms. Some of this propaganda is aimed at US audiences: 'You too can become a millionaire or president.' Hollywood does not

spotlight that to become president it helps to be a billionaire. Or, at least, you should be their agent, like Obama. The struggle street of a Roseanne is a rarity. That series has not been replaced since it ended in 1997. Suburban life on the screen looks like wall-to-wall affluence. The consumption goods on display advertise new stuff without naming brands. Of course, there has always been plenty of paid product placement.

### Colonised mentalities

The monopolisers invade the subconscious with more than adverts. Watching a big or small screen is like dreaming. Most of the time we do it in darkened spaces. The promotion of local content does more than provide jobs for local actors and crews. Culture is always a contest over content. Soft power triumphs once an imperium has control of the reproduction of ideas. That influence spreads from tertiary education to heavy-metal.

Until the US push from the 1920s, a British garrison of professors, bishops, headmasters and editors had stood over cultural life in settler Australia. The locals wrote back but had to cut deals with London publishers. Even Xavier Herbert signed up with William Collins for *Poor Fellow My Country* in 1975.

After 170 years of settlement, the outcome was a variant on what the African Marxist psychiatrist Franz Fanon diagnosed as a 'colonised mentality'. The founder-editor of the independent fortnightly, *Nation*, T.M. Fitzgerald, reflected on his experiences as an airman in the anti-fascist war:

Anybody who has sat among a mass audience in a British or American cinema, while a locally made film takes some story as the excuse for an observant romp over familiar streets and landmarks and for an imaginative statement of their national characteristics, knows the blend of stimulation and assurance that comes from it. It plants one's feet on the ground. The working world is integrated with the world of one's imagination. It is disastrously not so in Australia ... The daydreams we get from celluloid are not Australian daydreams.

What is true for daydreams is also true for our nightmares. Hence, most Australians in 1958 could rattle off the names of several tribes of North American Indians. We had seen them being slaughtered by the timely arrival of the cavalry. Almost no Australian here could have named the indigenous tribe that had occupied the site of her or his suburban cinema. How many could do so today?

Much the same was happening with popular music on the Hit Parades. Meanwhile, chemistry texts explained molecular structure in terms of grid-iron football. The Academy of Science produced *The Web of Life* in 1967 as one of several texts grounded in the world around us on this continent.

If all that is esteemed, fun or exciting comes from elsewhere, then we grow up accepting that nothing good can happen here. What follows if we look to Paris for ideas, to Hollywood for movies and to Nashville for sound? We are more vulnerable the snake-oil salesmen when they come peddling military alliances and offers to buy up the farm, offers that you can't refuse.

### Dardanelles to drones

Today, the force of soft power is grafting ANZUS onto ANZAC. Even the sounds of those terms seem to blur their significance. The Gallipoli Legend began as the

claim that the invasion of the Canakkale peninsula gave birth to the Australian nation. That claim was imperial propaganda from the start. A significant twist has taken place. Now, the Legend is being spun into the Howard-Killard cloth. We must be subservient to US strategy regarding China and the Zionist entity.

Explaining *why* this redirection of the Legend has happened is easier than tracing *how*. The answer to *why* rests in the needs of the US warfare state and the corporations that it defends. Tracking *how* that policy has been kept acceptable to around 90 percent of the Australian population is multi-layered. Identifying all the agents of influence, such as Hawke and Carr, is beyond the scope of this talk. However, two components connect to its themes.

The first is the ways in which the history of settler Australia has been taught - and has not been taught. Opinion polls reveal that many of us are unsure of what event is commemorated on Australia Day, 26 January. Others think of Anzac Day as the holiday when Essendon plays Collingwood. How many realise that AIF is short for Australian *Imperial* Force, not Infantry? It cannot be repeated too often that the AIF in 1915 was invading Turkey. That country has never posed any kind of threat to us. Moreover, the ANZACs were there to preserve the Czarist regime. The warmonger Churchill wanted a warm-water port to keep the Russians in the war. We have to place our past and future within the web of contests for global dominance. We need a Red-Armband view of our past to defeat historical incorrectness. (By the way, the Imperial Japanese Navy escorted the ANZACs to the Middle East in 1914.)

Screen culture can be a powerful mis-educator. The military history of Australia has been reduced to thirty-second television promos. They leave the impression that the original ANZACs fought on the Kokoda trail in defence of Darwin. Such distortions can pass unnoticed because of the downplaying of Australia in curricula.

The mass media and public instructors have either ignored or misrepresented our experiences. I'd bet Paris to a peanut that few Australians know much about the ANZUS Treaty. For instance, how many realise that it no longer includes New Zealand? In the 1980s, its government refused to admit US warships if they were nuclear armed. That is partly why the spin has shifted away from Treaty to Alliance.

Successive Australian governments have been pro-active in serving US interests. Canberra never sat back waiting for an order from Washington to send troops to Korea, Indo-China, Afghanistan or Iraq. The usual explanation for such enthusiasm is that the strategists hoped to buy support in future conflicts that did not directly involve US interests. That is true. But that answer leaves out a crucial element. From the signing of the Treaty in 1951, both sides have known that the US is not a reliable ally. Hence, Australian governments keep sending Australians to kill and be killed in the hope that their blood would give Canberra some leverage in Washington.

The ANZUS Treaty has always been just another 'scrap of paper'. That truth was spelt out at the start. U.S. negotiator and later Secretary of State John Foster Dulles told the US Senate:

But treaty words in themselves have little power to compel action.

Treaties of alliance and of mutual aid mean little except as they spell out what the people concerned would do anyway.

The Yanks came in 1942 because they needed Australia as a refitting station and aircraft carrier. They used us against their Japanese rivals for 'slices of the Chinese melon'. The US agreed to ANZUS in 1951 to get Australia's signature on the Japan Peace Treaty. The Pentagon needed Tokyo against the recently liberated China.

China remains the prize. The aim is not to 'contain' China. The ambition is to Neo-colonise it. The Asian Century is not meant to be the century in which Asia rules. Henry Luce of Time-Life proclaimed 'the American Century' in 1941. He looked forward to the day when 'Asia will be worth to us four, five, ten billions of dollars a year.' The Neo-Cons championed the 'New American Century' from the late 1990s. Today, the Asian Century is code for how to dominate Asia once more. Fueling fear of a naval threat from China has twin objectives. At home, the scare-mongering is propaganda to keep funding the military-industrial-legislative-academic complex. In East Asia, the increased air and naval clout is to pressure the Chinese into a new era of 'Open Door' towards US corporations.

### Radical ANZACs

We must carry the battle of position along the ideological front into every issue. We lose out economically, politically and strategically if we let warmongers have ANZAC while we shelter behind the Eureka stockade. Foremost, we have to combat how the ANZAC centenary in 1915 is being used to support war in Afghanistan. Tied to that is the effort to promote Marine, drone and naval bases from Darwin and Katherine to Sterling in West Australia.

The Left has a mighty counter in the man with the donkey. Jack Simpson was a red-hot unionist. He wrote to his mother in England asking when the British were going to have a revolution and get rid of the dukes and millionaires. We have to make his proletarian politics into the heart of his sacrifice. On the battle front, he did want he had done on job-sites. He took care of his workmates. Simpson's story is to become a feature film. If he appears as the leftie that he was, we can publicise the truth. On the other hand, if we get more lies about his politics, we can score a blow by using that lie to ask what other lies the movie is pushing about the war. We are lucky to have Peter Cochrane's 1992 biography as the anchor for the radical Simpson. Cochrane exposes the lies that the lickspittle Reverend Sir Irving Benson pushed during the fiftieth anniversary in 1965.

A recent feature about the European War reveals the kind of distortions we have to prevent. *Beneath Hill 60* (2010) does show that the soldiers on both sides who were burrowing under the lines were working miners. The director got suckered into framing the story with a family romance about the Australian officer-engineer in charge. Worst of all, conscription is not mentioned. The battle of Messines came in June 1917, between the two plebiscites. It is a lie to ignore that the miners on the Western Front were talking about conscription. A majority of frontline troops voted 'No' on both occasions. They were also arguing about the Labor rats led by Prime Minister Hughes. The film squibbed an opportunity to enrich the script by weaving in class conflict. Like the 1981 film *Gallipoli*, *Beneath Hill 60* also puts the blame on British commanders. There were stupid brutes of officers in the AIF.

Our main counter-offensive to the official ANZAC propaganda will be through promoting the defeat of conscription in 1916 and again in 1917. Those

victories were votes by a majority of the population. So was the rejection of the referendum to ban the Communist party in 1951. Those three victories are highpoints for the Spirit of Eureka. We should not be surprised that these struggles have never been on our screens. Their absence is all the more reason for insisting that they should be up in lights.

Had the conscription plebiscites gone the other way, the War Precautions Act would have scuttled bourgeois democracy. Commonwealth Solicitor-General, Sir Robert Garran, recorded the threat in his memoirs. He had drafted regulations under the Act, he wrote,

to make sure that nothing necessary was omitted, and the result soon was that John Citizen was hardly able to lift a finger without coming under the penumbra of some technical offence.

Indeed, the War Precautions (Repeal) Act of 1920 allowed the government in 1929 - ten years after the war - to convict the secretary of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. He had encouraged something in the manner of strike.

The battle for 'liberty' was not won on the Western Front. It was won in the free-speech and anti-conscription fights across this country. Builders' Labourers' organiser Samuel Champ spoke that truth in the Hobart Domain during 1916:

Our liberties had not been won by mining magnates and stock exchange jobbers, but by genuine men of the working-class movement who had died on the gallows and rotted in dungeons and were buried in nameless graves. These are the men to whom we owe the liberties we enjoyed today.

While Champ was speaking, the sometime Federal Attorney-General Sir William Hill 'Iceberg' Irvine, was calling on the British government to amend its Commonwealth of Australia Act. He wanted Westminster to impose conscription here for service overseas. That legal possibility is a reminder that 'our' constitution was an Act of the British Parliament. Whitehall had amended the Australians' draft in 1900 to protect British investors.

Some of the tens of millions being lavished on the Gallipoli centenary should go into a television series telling the story of Broken Hill's strike-leader, anti-conscriptionist and slain Percy Brookfield. Paul Robert Adams's 2009 biography, *the best hated man in Australia*, provides the basis for a script. We must do all we can to tell the stories of diggers who came home as anti-war activists. Those heroes include Hugo Throssell, VC, Bert Facey who gave us *A Fortunate Life*. The last ANZAC, Alex Campbell, is another working-class militant.

### The first Pacific War

We also have to sink the recently invented 'Battle for Australia'. There was no 'Battle for Australia' to compare with the Battle of Britain. The Japanese never intended to invade Australia. Their strategy was to cut Australia off from the US. After the war, the U.S. Navy and its local agents staged Coral Sea Week celebrations to spread the lie that the 'Yanks Had Saved Us' in 1942. In fact, the Japanese won that naval engagement.

Colonel Blimps dominate the Council. They are backed by the Department of Veterans Affairs. No surprise there. More alarming is that the History Teachers Association has signed up to tell lies to school children. Teachers in the field need to make their Association withdraw. They have the research by Peter Stanley to



help them tell the truth about 1942. Meanwhile, academics have enlisted for a transfusion of the blood money. Some beneficiaries of this funding can be relied upon to pose hard questions. This year, for instance, a labour history conference stressed the economic offensive waged by the boss class. Those who raise class questions do so as 'objective' scholars? How many will join Peter Stanley on the platform against the U.S. bases?

War memorials are sites for challenging the militarists. Those broken columns and Cenotaphs are memorials to workers killed in the service of big capital. In so-called peace time, free labour is compelled into wage-slavery to expand capital. Military service is a different kind of work for the bosses.

Alan Seymour's 1962 play, *The One Day of the Year* drives to the heart of this relationship. ANZAC Day is shown as the only day on which the unskilled ex-World War Two digger gets respect. His job as a lift driver in a department store is demeaning. What an indictment of capitalism that work is undervalued while war is sanctified. Why has *One Day of the Year* never been made into a movie?

The same question mark hangs over perhaps the finest play written here, John Romeril's *The Floating World* (1974). We travel with an alcoholic ex-POW back through time on a *Women's Weekly* Cherry Blossom Cruise to Japan. Before the final curtain, the characters and the audience are confronted by awkward questions. Romeril unsettles our attitudes towards Asia, whether in war against Japanese militarists or against the peoples of Indo-China.

In 1962, the RSL called for the banning of *The One Day of the Year*. Its leaders did not want to hear about difficulties of returned soldiers in peacetime. The paradox now is that we hear voices around the Left who prefer silence to engagement. We won't beat back the ANZAC-ANZUS push by desertion. Still less will we prevail by throwing mud at the troops, or denying their individual courage and collective sacrifice. Those virtues are what keeps Simpson so appealing. Our job is to reveal his sacrifice as the embodiment of working-class solidarity.

#### Human labour – the missing link

Just as the local went missing in action from our screens, so has most of the labour force. There are plenty of doctors, nurses, police, lawyers, soldiers and waiters in screenplays. Yet is rare to encounter the kinds of paid work that most of us do most of the time. *Sunday Too Far Away* is one of the rare feature films from anywhere in which the storyline is driven by the details of human labour. Jack Thompson stars as the union rep. The working lives of shearers is tracked in the build-up to the 1956 shearers' strike. It does not glamorise them. The characters and conflicts are as vivid today as they were when the film was shot in 1975. As the unionists prepare to fight the scabs, we glimpse one stalwart removing his false teeth. As the son of a barmaid, I thrill when the woman publican looks the leader of the blacklegs in the eye and says: 'We don't serve scabs here.'

The South Australian Film Commission recently funded an equally powerful account of 'no work' in *Snowtown*.

On occasion, the screen presents dramatic stories such as *Strikebound* (1984) about the 1934 strike at Wonthaggi. Television has had series about the waterfront confrontations of 1928 and 1998. The fact that we can name most of the worker-related productions is proof of how exceptional they are. It is also

significant that these three are about stopping work. We need films about how our labours keep everything going.

Instead, the culture of distraction floods out of television. Australian science fiction writer George Turner calls it 'the Triv' in his 1988 novel about economic collapse and ecological catastrophe, *The Sea and Summer*. It won the Arthur C. Clarke Award. Much of what I have been saying can be summed up by asking why this novel has never been filmed.

The reasons why the contribution of work is marginal to the entertainment industry are not hard to find. The managing-director of the Nine network spelt out one element in 1970:

The man who comes home from the Ford production line, or from driving a cab through our chaotic traffic, or indeed from conferences at the advertising agency, is, more often than not, wrecked from a hard day. He wants to get a drink in his hand, have a talk with the wife, enjoy a feed and relax. And four out of five men relax with tele – and that's quite right.

The mass media is the equivalent of fast food or a warm bath. It is the opiate of wage-slaves after being zonked by serving the boss's bottom line.

The rest of the explanation for avoiding work as a theme parallels the reason why the local is downplayed. The last thing that the distraction industry is supposed to do is to remind workers that we add all the value in the economy. The ruling class claims that capital provides the jobs and thus ensures the production of wealth. The truth is that capital is dead labour. Capital depends on our living labour for its existence.

That fact of exploitation is why the apologists for capital think up fantasies to justify profit-taking. Early in the nineteenth century, one argument was that capitalists earned their profits because they had abstained from spending on themselves. This fable dropped from sight once it was realised that it could not justify the inheritance of fortunes. Dad might have denied himself the pleasures of wine, women and song. Meanwhile, his kids had gone without nothing. Think Gina and her brood.

Recognising that capital is accumulated from our labour is crucial to debates over foreign investment. The element that capitalists – local and foreign - hide is that capital comes from their exploitation of our labour-power. Hence, the case against foreign takeovers has to be grounded in an analysis of capital as the outcome of exploitation around the world.

One mantra is that Australia needs to import more funds because we don't produce enough. A variant is the allegation that we don't save enough. We fail to abstain. How can this be? Firms have been making profits here for more than two hundred years. Where have they gone? Did the bosses squander them on themselves? Or did much of it end up overseas? In 1979, the head of CRA, Roderick Carnegie, laid out what keeps happening:

People don't realise the cost. If you get four dollars in 1979 from overseas invested in equities, those owners want a dollar a year from 1990 onwards forever .... That's a very high price, and in political terms it doesn't seem a high price because they are four dollars coming in today, but in 10, 11 years time, a dollar a year out is an enormous price to pay.

We have been paying that price for twenty decades. The cost is more than in the dollars going overseas. The cost is the investments that are not made here to provide jobs and fund welfare.

This flight of profit has been the case in the film industry. One instance indicates the wider story. After 1945, the Sterling zone was short of US dollars. The Australian authorities therefore restricted the repatriation of profits. Twentieth Century Fox thought it could use its hoard to fund production down-under. The result was the first colour feature film to be shot here, *Kangaroo*, in 1952. Similarly, retained profits made by General-Motors during the war underwrote the first Holden in 1948. How many films could have been made if more of the profits had been retained? How much more local R&D could there have been to underpin manufacturing jobs? In such ways are the needs of our class tied to the struggle for independence.

### The politics of watching

To proclaim that workers have no country is lop-sided. True, Australian workers do not yet 'have' Australia as our country. It is owned by the class that exploits us. However, working people do have this country because it is the product of our labours. Paid and unpaid labour at work, at home and in the community is what keeps on re-making Australia. Workers understand that.

We become what we do. That is true for individuals, for classes and as a species. We remake ourselves as we re-make this country. That core precept of historical materialism makes nationalism necessary. For good or ill, nationalism is not just an idea in our heads. We make national cultures through social activity. We might call that activity labour, work or history. It includes works of the imagination. Our task is to contest their content. We can either assert our moral superiority or strive to change peoples' minds. Moralisers intone: 'Thank you god for not making me like other Australians'. That prayer will never broaden anyone's outlook or deepen their thinking.

Only by listening will we be able to draw the best from prevailing attitudes. Most Australians will agree that they are either nationalists or patriots. Some will say they are one, but definitely not the other. Some will use patriotism to mean gung-ho militarism. Others will mean protecting the environment. Patriotism can also mean loving Australia so much that you seek out what is wrong to make our place the best it can be.

Cultural spaces do not remain empty. We can fill them with a combination of progressive ideas and local experiences. Or we let them be dominated by reactionary monopoly propaganda. The anti-nationalists object to Fox News. They have little to say against the invasion of screen culture by Twentieth Century Fox. A handful froth at the mouth at any mention of nationalism. Yet their eyes glaze over at the first reference to capitalism. They do get agitated by imperialism. They confuse it with colonialism. We need to focus imperialism as monopolising capitals.

Other double standards operate. Those who deplore cultural nationalism nonetheless enthuse over *Daughters of the Sun*, *Redfern Now* and Tony Ayers' television series on Chinese-Australians. The progressiveness of such programmes is undermined by any implication that only stories about ethnic minorities are worthwhile. That prejudice comes across as saying that the lives of the Anglo-Celtic majority are of lesser worth, if not worthless. From that perspective, the stories of white males are limited to the negative ones of racism and sexism. That bias drives people towards Howard and Hansen. Those who denounce the efforts to promote the best that we have achieved are doing the

work of the enemy. The more the moralisers denigrate, even ignore, the local past, the more they hand the future over to the exploiters.

The agents of corporate capital are aware of the clout of soft power. They know that its relentless application clears the way for demands on the economy and for war-making. We have to catch up. It is truer to say that we need to reawaken the impulse to take a greater say in how our imaginations are formed. We need more campaigns like the one in 2010 that upheld the limited protection that remains for local book publishers and writers. That effort was led by children's authors. They did not want their characters saying 'mom' instead of 'mum'. Blinky Bill and Possum Magic attach children to our environments as a foundation for its protection. From pre-school to proletarian critiques of political economy the same pedagogical rule applies: start from immediate experience. As Lawson puts it: 'I was born on Grenfell flat, And you can't get over that.'

Australian critic A.A. Phillips had coined the phrase 'cultural cringe' in 1950 for what Fanon would analyse as 'colonised mentalities'. Phillips criticised those Australians who assumed that anything local had to be inferior to everything from overseas. The cringers were craven toward 'Home', as many native-born Australians were still calling Britain. Reflecting on reactions against the 'cringe', Phillips recognised that one of its ill-effects had been to provoke its opposite. The 'cultural strut' is a variant on chauvinism under which everything Australian is said to be superior to everything else. Phillips had examined the craftsmanship of Henry Lawson's short stories. He found much to admire. Those qualities did not automatically make Lawson a finer writer than Chekhov. To jump to that conclusion was one expression of the 'strut'. Phillips recognised another local characteristic which he saw as the way out of both the cringe and the strut. The 'slouch' is a relaxed upright stance. That attitude is in Lawson's lines: 'They call no biped lord or sir, And touch their hats to no man!' The slouch is the spirit of Eureka.

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