

Polly is really crackers — he talks to people

By TINA DIAZ

When a parrot in Germany declares "Polly wants a cracker", chances are it will be rushed off to the vet.

In Sydney people who talk to their feathered friends are more likely to be regarded as "crackers".

The head of Germany's Oberhausen Institute of Parrot Research, Mr Werner Lantermann, says a bird which imitates human voices has a behavioural disorder.

He said parrots needed the company of other birds, but because most were kept on their own in cages, they could only communicate with humans.

To break their isolation, the parrots

tried to establish contact by imitating human sounds, he said.

One galah owner in Collaroy Plateau, Mrs Maureen Bousfield, 52, said five-year-old Bertie might imitate her cough and the click of her cigarette lighter when she lit up, but that this was not a great concern when compared with what her neighbours may think when they hear her respond to Bertie's questions.

"Bertie might say 'Maureen what ya' doin' now, ya' doin' the dishes?' People will probably think I'm bonkers when they hear me answer 'Yes, Bertie'," Mrs Bousfield said.

"Parrots have the brain capacity of a two-year-old child, but I wouldn't say all two-year-olds have brain disorders."

Her husband, John, 54, said the galah "never shuts up and often bursts into torrents of double-dutch with words we have never heard before", but that this was not strange behaviour.

"He says 'John, how ya' going?', and when Maureen puts the key in the door, he screams 'Maureeeeen'."

Mr Bousfield said Bertie had a vocabulary of about 30 words, which had been developed over the years through television programs and Bertie's conversations with children who passed the veranda on their way to school.

Mr Lantermann said parrots became a problem when they reached sexual maturity, because they plucked their feathers, guarded their cages and in some cases emitted deafening cries.

He said they turned into pests that nibbled the furniture, chewed books and ruined the carpet.

The Taronga Zoo bird curator, Mr Graeme Phipps, said a parrot that talked was not necessarily sick, but agreed that birds had behavioural disorders, which were reactions to their caged surroundings.

"Cockatoos are some of the best talkers, which is why people have them as pets," Mr Phipps said.

"In small cages they can't display their full range of behavioural repertoire."

A Thornleigh veterinary surgeon who specialises in birds, Dr Ross Perry, said one in every three birds sent to him for consultation was

suffering from a behavioural disorder. "They feather-pick, scream and masturbate on their owners' hands, because they don't have a mate of their own kind," Mr Perry said.

He said most of the birds with this sort of behaviour also talked, but that this was not abnormal and it did not mean they were demented, just that they had been forced to adjust to different surroundings.

"Intelligence is a product of ability and effective communication, and I encourage people to speak to animals and plants. Although they don't understand, they can appreciate the tone of the voice and can sense that there's communication, even if it is at a non-verbal level."

ACTU seeks to suppress controversial film

By JOHN LYONS

After four years and \$200,000 of taxpayers' money, the ACTU is attempting to suppress a film made for Australian television on the history of the trade union movement.

Unhappy with the interpretation of the film, the ACTU wants to prevent the film being shown and find a new film-maker who will make a history more to its liking.

The film, *Amongst Equals*, now at the centre of a legal and political dispute, was commissioned by the ACTU in 1987 for showing during the Bicentenary celebrations the following year. It was funded by the Australian Bicentenary Authority.

The agreement was for Film Australia to make a "critical appraisal" of the union movement's history suitable for showing on television. Film Australia chose the award-winning film-maker Tom Zubrycki, who has made a study of Australian labour history, to make the film.

"We don't want the film to go out," Simon Crean, the former ACTU president, said this week. "We don't want to be seen to be censoring, but on the other hand we believe we have got a positive message to sell. We don't want the

both angered by the illegal showing. They believed Film Australia held the only copy of the film, but in fact Mr Zubrycki had made several tapes in case the ACTU tried to seize the Film Australia copy.

Mr Zubrycki said this week it had become clear the ACTU had wanted a propaganda film rather than a critical appraisal.

"Television doesn't cop simple propaganda," he said. "My bottom line was I wasn't going to do something which was historically inaccurate."

Mr Zubrycki told the audience at this week's screening in Sydney's Tom Mann Theatre that Mr Crean had been upset that the final part of the film opened with a scene of the Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, being derided by unionists at a demonstration.

He said Mr Crean also had been upset that Western Australia's Robe River dispute of 1986 and Queensland's bitter SEQEB dispute received coverage — both were defeats for the union movement.

"I just can't ignore the defeats," Mr Zubrycki said.

The ACTU is in an awkward situation because even the ACTU's official historian, Mr Jim Hagan, Dean of Arts at Wollongong University, has praised the film, saying it "should be essential viewing for everyone interested in the movement's future".

As well as not liking references to the ACTU's defeats, ACTU officials did not like references to Norm Gallagher's green bans, which preserved buildings in the 1970s and references to the Communist Party, as having been a significant force in Australian industrial relations in the 1940s.

Mr Crean, now Minister for Science, when asked this week to specify aspects he was not happy with, said the film "has a go at Hawke" over the initial failure of the equal pay campaign for women.

He added that he did not think the material over the SEQEB dispute was "terrific", and on Robe River he said: "I would have been happy if it had interpreted the significance of Robe from the point of view of the centralised system rather than just an attempt by the New Right to change working conditions."

The head of Film Australia, Mr Bruce Moir, when asked whether he would accede to the ACTU's request to have the film returned, said: "I can't answer that."

Mr Moir said: "One doesn't particularly want to buy into a public brawl with the ACTU. We have been subjected to a major financing review which has not gone through Cabinet yet."

"By all accounts from Canberra everything is looking good and a public brawl with the ACTU wouldn't help."

Television doesn't cop simple propaganda.

film to go out because they have not discharged their contractual obligation to us."

The ACTU is now arguing the film should have placed greater emphasis on "the achievements of the Accord" whereas Zubrycki, while addressing the Accord, does not focus on it as much as the ACTU wished.

To prevent the film being shown, Mr Crean's successor, Mr Martin Ferguson, has written to Film Australia demanding that it turn over to the ACTU "all scripts, films, videotape and any other associated material".

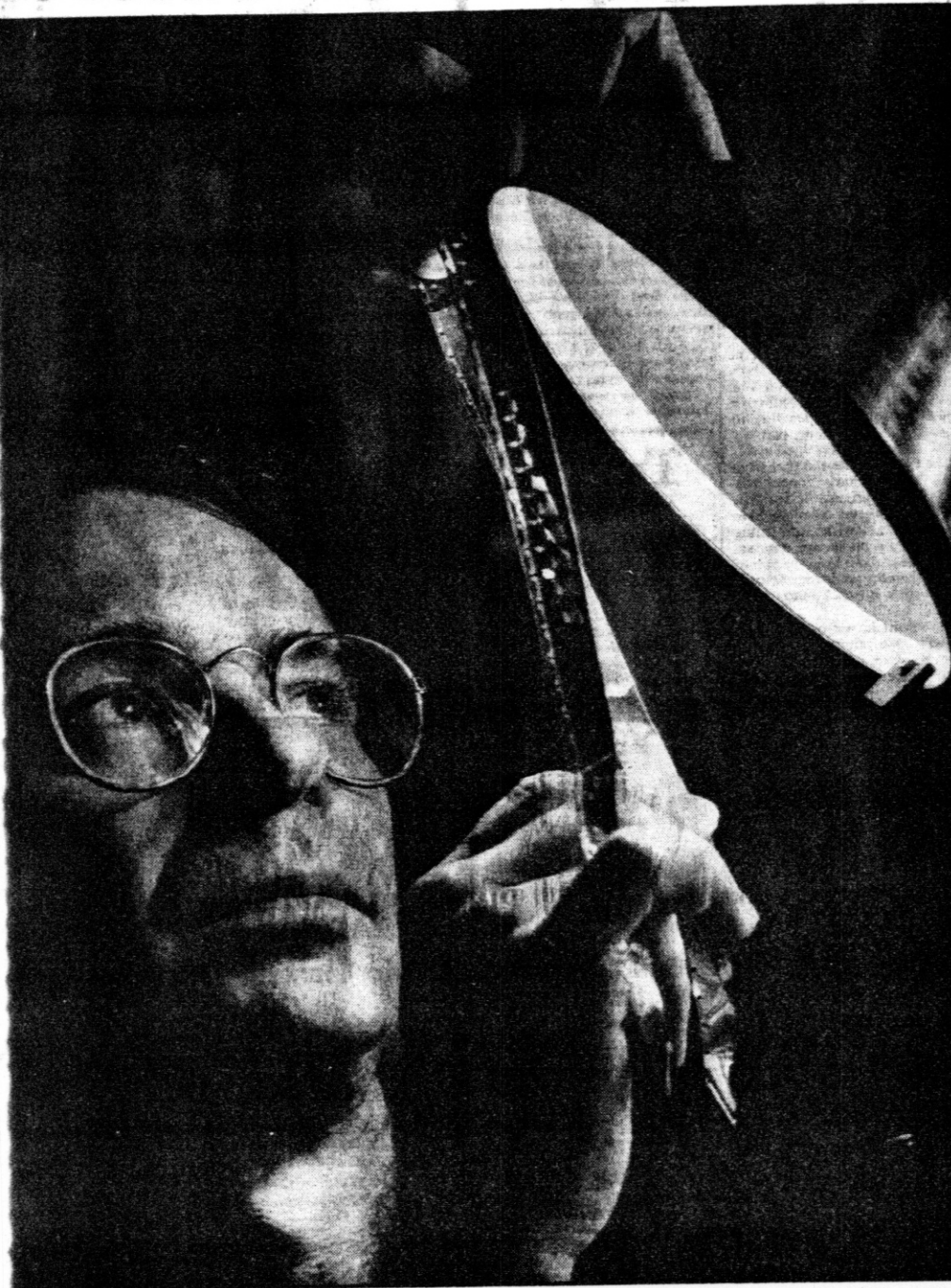
ACTU officials are particularly upset about the last part of the film.

Mr Crean said: "We expect to get what we asked for... all we got was an historical depiction. We didn't get the last big chapter [the achievements of the Accord]."

The dispute over the film is set to come to a head after Mr Zubrycki this week began showing the film illegally — the first pirate screening was in Sydney on Tuesday night.

This has angered the ACTU, whose arts officer, Mr Peter Duncan, said yesterday: "We want to know how he's got the copy. The film is a great disappointment to us."

Mr Duncan and Mr Crean were



Picture by PETER RAE

Zubrycki ... "I wasn't going to do something which was historically inaccurate."

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The Amongst Equals story

Mark Styles reports on how Tom Zubrycki and the ACTU reached an impasse

Five years after endorsing a proposal by filmmaker Tom Zubrycki to make a critical history of the Australian labour movement, the Australian Council of Trade Unions has actively tried to suppress the result.

In 1986 Zubrycki, director of the award winning films *Kemira: Diary of a Strike* and *Friends and Enemies*, sought support for a documentary series on the history of the Australian labour movement. Film Australia was interested in the project and together with Zubrycki approached the Australian Bicentennial Authority for money to make the series. The ABA agreed to provide funds for the project if a suitable sponsor could be found in line with ABA policy of channelling Bicentennial money through recognised institutions.

The ACTU was the obvious candidate to sponsor the film and agreed to act in this role in early 1987. With the ACTU as sponsor and Film Australia as producer, Zubrycki was officially subcontracted by Film Australia to script and direct the film. The script was finally approved by the ACTU after extensive consultation with Zubrycki and production began in late 1987.

At this point all parties to the project agreed on three ground rules:

- that the series would be a "critical history";
- that it would be made with a prime time television audience in mind;
- and that it would be ready for screening in 1988.

In the editing process all parties agreed to a three part structure for the series: the first part was to deal with the period 1850 to 1939, the second with 1939 to 1972, and the third was to cover 1972 to the present. The series was completed to Zubrycki's and Film Australia's satisfaction by the middle of 1988, but when shown the fine cut, the ACTU didn't like what they saw.

Opinions as to what it was the ACTU didn't like differ considerably. The ACTU says the series doesn't emphasise "the last big chapter", the achievements of the Prices and Incomes Accord, and makes insufficient reference to the success of the arbitration process. Zubrycki says the ACTU never wanted an independent critical history of the labour movement and tried to turn the series into propaganda for the ACTU instead. According to Zubrycki, the ACTU was also concerned about references to the role of the Communist Party as an organising force amongst unionists and the portrayal of instances of worker militancy such as the 1971 Ford strike.

"The ACTU thought the series too 'workerist'", Zubrycki says, "but this is actually a world-wide trend in labour history and has been for twenty years since EP Thompson started writing about 'history from below'".

"All I've tried to do is to fit in with this trend i.e. seeking to look at workers themselves, their experiences, their work and their industrial activity, not simply looking at institutions that represent them.

"You can't hope to understand labour history without looking at the political, social and economic conditions which govern a society at a given time. To criticise this approach shows the narrow-minded and monolithic interpretation the ACTU is interested in," Zubrycki says.

However Zubrycki agreed to try and address the ACTU's concerns and three recuts were done in the second half of 1988 but, according to Zubrycki, each recut seemed to lead only to a further set of objections.

In a final attempt to arbitrate the matter

Screening dates for *Amongst Equals*:

Sydney - Harold Park Hotel *Politics in the Park*, screening and forum, 2.30pm February 24; Balmain Town Hall two screenings 6pm and 8pm March 15.

Melbourne - RMIT Glasshouse Cinema, two screenings 7.30pm and 9.30pm February 28.

Adelaide - February 29 venue to be decided; Perth, Hobart, Brisbane - screenings in late February and early March. See local press for details.

of Arts at Wollongong University and the ACTU's official historian, as consultant to the project.

Hagan worked with Zubrycki to produce a version which Hagan felt accommodated the ACTU's concerns and also met the standards of historical accuracy. The end result however was still unsatisfactory to the ACTU which held up funds to complete the film. By mid 1989 the Bicentennial Authority, believing that a stalemate had been reached, had frozen the rest of the money allocated to the project.

The stalemate continued for another year. Then, at its August 1990 meeting, the ACTU executive recommended that the ACTU terminate its contract with Film Australia and appoint a Melbourne-based audio-visual company to remake the film and to "investigate other options for positive use of the material in other areas."

Faced with the prospect of having his project taken out of his hands altogether, Zubrycki wrote to every member of the ACTU executive personally, outlining the history of the project and urging them to reconsider their decision. He also sent each member a video copy of the series so that they could judge for themselves. But an executive member in December 1990 reconfirmed its earlier decision, despite reported concern amongst several members about the stand the ACTU was taking.

In a last effort to rally support for the project, Zubrycki went public with his story in early January 1991. Media interviews and

illegal showings of the uncompleted film have aroused considerable public interest in the project.

As the legal owner of the copyright in the project the ACTU has requested that Film Australia surrender all the film material in its possession to the ACTU and Film Australia has complied with this request.

Bruce Moir, managing director at Film Australia, said that the series, now called *Amongst Equals*, was a commissioned program and the rights and responsibilities of all parties were straightforward, as reflected in the contracts. The ACTU as sponsor had the right to determine the final content of the film. Moir said Zubrycki, as the sub-contracted director, was employed to deliver a film to the sponsor's satisfaction.

Statement by ACTU:

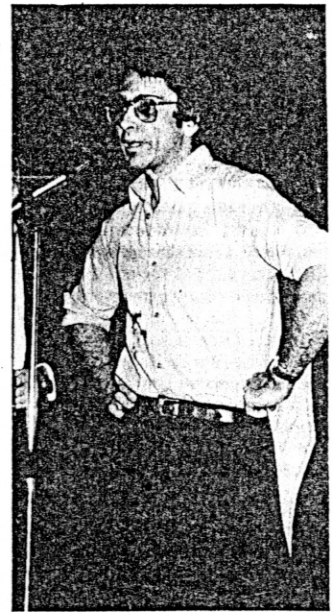
"An 'official' documentary about the union movement should encompass the full range of opinions and attitudes within the union movement. We asked for a quality documentary, a critical analysis reflecting all points of view. Mr Zubrycki's film is unrepresentative of mainstream unionism. It reinforces stereotypes and prejudices.

"When we commissioned the film, we wanted a documentary which helped to break down prejudices and showed the healthy fact that there are differing points of view among our 2.5 million members.

"While the Australia union movement is proud of its strong blue collar support, the film has a tendency to ignore the movement's work for white collar workers, non-Anglo Saxon workers, Aborigines and women.

"The film also wallows in the sensational film footage of strikes and demonstrations. It ignores reality—the fact that the overwhelming majority of union disputes are settled without disruption, without strikes, without demonstrations."

Martin Ferguson, ACTU secretary, Sydney Morning Herald



Tom Zubrycki speaking out

Film Australia's role has been to manage the project.

"On this occasion it has not been possible to reconcile the various points of view regarding the content of the film", Moir said.

Film Australia's handling of the affair has aroused disquiet amongst Sydney's independent filmmakers. Zubrycki has put the issue bluntly: "As the producer, Film Australia has an ethical obligation not only to defend the film and the filmmaker but also to vigorously defend the principles of artistic freedom and creative integrity. In this case they have done neither."

The alleged censorship of an important film has brought expressions of support for Zubrycki from a wide spectrum of people and organisations, including academics, unionists and fellow filmmakers. Groups as diverse as the Screen Directors Association and the Miners Federation and individuals from Donald Home to Robyn Williams have come out in support of Zubrycki's right to make the series according to his original intention, endorsed by the ACTU.

Sylvia Lawson has commented: "Bicentennial funds were intended to produce histories which had been repressed and submerged—the hidden

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Strikers rising up angry at the Ford plant in Melbourne in 1971

DOCO ISSUE

SPECIAL FEATURE

Amongst Equals: Issues for Historians

Ann Curthoys believes documentarists need to make their role clear — and stick to it

The current dispute is partly over interpretation of Australian trade union history, and partly about the rights of filmmakers and historians when undertaking commissioned work. The latter question inevitably leads one into some discussion of labour history itself. As a historian, for me there are several important issues in this debate - the nature of historical film, the question of historical interpretation generally, and the rights of historians and makers of historical film in relation to those who commission their work.

Historical Film

Tom Zubrycki has attempted to survey the history of the Australian trade union movement from its beginnings in the 1850s to the present. This history was to be, and I quote from Tom Zubrycki's background statement, "A critical appraisal of the trade union movement in Australia suitable for a general audience on prime-time television". So, the film had to work as history, it had to work as film, it had to be acceptable to the ACTU, and it had to be of interest to a general audience.

This amounts to a very difficult task, attempting to meet quite contradictory needs and requirements. First, it has to work as a film, within the conventions of audio-visual narration. This is difficult especially for periods before contemporary film footage is available and where the events discussed are too far back for oral history interviews. One must rely on still photographs and drawings, or recreations, or interviews with historians, or footage of places today where some significant event occurred in the past. The filmmaker must take into account the visual expectations of the audience, especially of a prime time television audience, saturated with audio-visual material and conventions. There are, that is, aesthetic and cultural judgements to be made, which cannot be equated with either political or historical judgement.

Interpretation in History

Second, the film has to work as an historical documentary, a work of history. This imposes a second set of restraints. Producing a worthwhile work of history is not merely a matter of getting the facts straight. Few historians today would regard writing or producing works of history as simply a matter of putting forward the "facts", nearly all would regard it as a matter of producing, each time, a new interpretation of, or understanding of, the past. What counts as a fact for one historian would be highly contested by another. Even where there is agreement, the significance attributed to a particular piece of evidence or statement about the past will differ enormously. Most historians, these days, recognise that each generation rewrites history, according to its own preoccupations

Amongst Equals

histories of the Australian people. In seeking to use those funds to promote its currently preferred self-images, the ACTU is arguably subverting those objectives. Where in all this is cultural democracy, free access to knowledge and historical honesty?"

A support group has been formed which is holding public screenings of *Amongst Equals* in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Wollongong. In addition there are an estimated 150 video copies of the film in circulation around Australia, and several unions such as the BWIU plan to hold screenings of their own.

and questions. This does not mean that we write any old history we like; we need to be thorough in our research, respect the evidence, take into account opposing points of view. But it does mean that there is a general scepticism about claims that there is one single true account of an event, or a movement, or an historical period.

Quite apart from the general point that works of history are always works of interpretation, there is also the more specific point that the writing of history is always pressed upon by political movements. The controversy surrounding Tom Zubrycki's *Amongst Equals* is yet another instance of what most historians and historical filmmakers already know - that writing history is an exceptionally political enterprise. Our object of study, the past, is fought over by all. Every political movement whether from the Right or the Left, whether in power or seeking radical social change, has a burning need to rewrite history, to create its own heroic figures, its own terms of reference. All the nationalist and national liberation movements, the movements for indigenous rights, the labour movement, the feminist movement - all find an understanding of the past of paramount importance.

But if history is a very political undertaking, and political movements always have a deep concern with history, history and politics are not the same, and cannot be reduced to one another. Those who commission histories, whether in film or print, need to respect the integrity of the historian, or the filmmaker, and not attempt to reduce historical work to the immediate needs of politics.

Historians, Filmmakers and Commissioned Work

Historians and filmmakers have rights when undertaking commissioned work. Historians generally, not only film historians, are currently waging a major battle in relation to commissioned work. Officials and commissioning bodies of all kinds have considerable difficulty in

recognising the expertise and respecting the professional integrity of the historian. Historians generally have particular problems when attempting to insist on the integrity of their work, and their right to produce their own interpretation, as professionals, a difficulty not encountered by other professional groups.

The reasons for the particular difficulties faced by historians and documentary filmmakers are clear. We all know history, we all have our own historical interpretations of the past which matters to us. Claims about the past are made by all of us, all the time, and lessons drawn and analogies made with great abandon. You don't need to be a historian to know or write history.

In the hands of the general public this popular appropriation of the past is a good thing. Ideas about the past simply can't be owned by a select group of experts, and those who are professional historians must constantly take popular historical memory into account. But in the hands of officials, of commissioning bodies, this view that anyone can know and write history can become a problem. The historian or filmmaker finds that their expertise, their years of research and work on the commissioned project, come to mean nothing in the eyes of their employer, the commissioning body. Their rights as producers, as workers really, are not respected. So, in this particular case, the ACTU has overridden the advice of its own historian, Professor Jim Hagan, and of Tom Zubrycki, a documentary filmmaker who it itself commissioned to make this film. As a result of this situation, historians and makers of historical film are finding that they need to develop or become part of a trade union, or professional organisation, which protects their rights in relation to their employers,

whether it be a private company, a government agency, or the ACTU.

There is, in fact, a body tackling these issues from the point of view of historians. This is the *Professional Historians Association* which so far has mainly represented people who produce written commissioned histories for various bodies, companies, government and local authorities, private organisations. Perhaps it is time for documentary filmmakers and the PHA to develop closer contacts, as the issues facing print and film historians are fundamentally the same. The PHA has been attempting to defend the rights of professional historians, developing codes of conduct and codes of ethics, and assisting historians insisted upon. The author or filmmaker, once hired, must control the final product.

Amongst Equals

Finally, some remarks about *Amongst Equals*. While I would disagree with the ACTU's stand on this issue whatever the film was like, in fact I also happen to think the rough cut version of the film, which we have just seen, is well worth viewing and discussing in any case. It is a very straightforward historical documentary film. Its overall case seems to me to be that trade union activity is an ongoing necessity, without which the workers are always vulnerable. The film may not be always praising the trade unions and the ACTU, but it does, indirectly, support the very foundations on which the ACTU is built - that is, collective working class organisation and action. The film portrays a story of defeats and successes,

continued next page

NATIONAL SCREENWRITERS' CONFERENCE

The Fourth National Screenwriters' Conference will be held from Thursday March 21 to Sunday March 24 at Lorne, Victoria

International guests will include Ring Lardner Jr., one of the "Hollywood Ten", known for scripts ranging from *Woman of the Year* through to *M*A*S*H*, and a long "hidden" period when he wrote much material for British television, under pseudonyms, including some forty episodes of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*.

Georgia Jeffries, writer producer on *Cagney and Lacey* and more recently *China Beach* will also be attending, as will writer/director Michael Tolkin, whose first US film *The Rapture* will have its world premiere at the Conference.

Some thirty local guests will complete the line-up.

Registration is now available at \$290 for writers, \$330 for non-writers. Please call, write or fax the Conference Office as below to receive your registration form.

National Screenwriters Conference, 32-36 Lt. Leveson St., Nth Melbourne Vic 3051. Tel. (03) 329 1022, Fax (03) 326 5493.

The National Screenwriters' Conference gratefully acknowledges the support of its sponsors including The Australian Film Commission, The Australia Council, Film Victoria, Channel Seven, Crawford Productions, The NSW Film and Television Office, The South Australian Film Industry Advisory Committee, The West Australian Film Council, The Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Simpson Le Mesurier, West-Side Production, Rick Raftos Management, Cameron's Management.

Statement by Tom Zubrycki

Martin Ferguson has made certain allegations and claims regarding *Amongst Equals*. Mr Ferguson obviously hasn't seen the movie. Had he seen it he would have noticed that one third of it is devoted to the movement's work for white collar workers, non-Anglo Saxon workers, Aborigines and women. Perhaps his real concern is the film's claim that, at certain points in its history, the union movement has been curiously out of step with the demands of exactly these groups.

"Likewise no single film can ever encompass the full range of opinions and attitudes within the trade union movement. My starting point was to look at workers (both white and blue collar) and their experiences. Labour historians have followed this approach for the last twenty years.

The film was made as a critical historical appraisal of the union movement and not as an official history. The history of the ACTU isn't the history of the trade union movement.

I believe the suppression of the film is a censorship issue because I contracted to work in consultation with the ACTU to make a critical appraisal of the trade union movement and not to make a piece of propaganda. I refuse to rewrite history.

Some are more equal than others

Hall Greenland reviews *Amongst Equals* and suggests a different future for it

It is difficult to do justice to a film that is unfinished, which has been re-cut five times at the sponsor's insistence, and which contains material the filmmaker is not happy with. And that is the case with this film.

From the filmmaker's point of view the film is compromised and contaminated; it is not his film.

I'm reluctant to give any comfort to the ACTU authoritarians by criticising the film but I'm coming from the position of someone who wants the film finished warts and all. Critical responses are not a reason for suppression, although the ACTU executive apparently believe this to be the case.

That said, what follows is a reaction to a draft, to a work-in-progress...

The thing I hate about *Amongst Equals* (and Tom shares this dislike) is the solemn, deathly voiceover. But this is appropriate enough I suppose, because this film and its fate represents the nadir of the union movement in this country. Never have things been worse in the labour movement and the dirge-like narrator's voice in *Amongst Equals* is entirely apt.

Fortunately the narrative dirge is often interrupted, and almost always enlivened, by some great anecdotes from veterans. These veterans are for the most part old, and not necessarily reconstructed, stalinists (using this term in its strict historical sense). It was not surprising to hear Bob Gould, Sydney book king and longtime Trotskyist, who liked the film, describe it as "romanticised Stalino-reformism" which, allowing for hyperbole, is not far off the mark.

The film is certainly convincing about the need for unions and as an historical film it certainly covers most of the ground: the eight hour movement of the 1850s; the new unionism of the 1880s; the strikes of the early 1890s; Justice Higgins and arbitration; industrial unionism in the 1910s and the IWW; the strikes and unemployed organising of the Great Depression; the war and full employment; the coal strike of 1949; the strike of Aboriginal stockmen at Wave Hill; the equal pay cases; the post-war exploitation of migrants...and so on. All this is conveyed at a brisk pace and with some remarkable archival footage.

Comprehensive as it is there is a general absence of rigour in much of the history. The Communist Party, for instance, gets off scot free, and the rise and ebb of the Grouper movement gets little or no attention. The

first world war gets good coverage but the difficulties of covering the second are avoided. Going further back, Tom certainly portrays the strikers of 1890-2 as more aggressive than they in fact were.

Much of this comes down to Tom being too 'close' to his material and subjects. The talking heads, for instance, are all wonderful people, but does that exclude the necessity of asking them some sharp questions that would cut through the comfortable (and almost certainly inaccurate) nostalgia?

Also absent is proper emphasis on the tensions and conflicts which have been at the heart of the movement: between officials and members, between arbitrationists and direct actionists, between craft unionists and industrialists, between centralists and federationists, between status quo-ists and genuine reformists. It is these dramatic contradiction which have given the movement much of its impetus and determined its character. (Sadly they are almost absent from the movement today and may have disappeared forever.)

But even if the history in *Amongst Equals* is romanticised and inadequate, it contains the kernel of unavoidable truth that the union movement has been a disturber-of-the-peace in Australia's history. And this is what the ACTU leaders cannot stand to be reminded of. All their talk of the

Accord, and their complaint that it is underestimated in the film, is another way of saying this, because the Accord is the ultimate respectable marriage between the ACTU bureaucracy and the Establishment. In their dotage of respectability, the ACTU heads cannot bear to be reminded of their genealogy.

It cannot be said however that Tom set out to disturb these Establishment *parvenus* from the ACTU; he has, in fact, bent over backwards in an attempt to placate them. But the material, notwithstanding its romantic gloss, is just not that malleable.

Amongst Equals is one of those remarkable films which cannot be divorced from its reception, but it fails to anticipate its reception by its sponsors. The film itself does not suggest an answer to the question of why the ACTU leaders want to restrict and strangle this film.

All this leads to a final recommendation: The final version of *Amongst Equals* should now include and integrate the story and conditions of its production. *Amongst Equals* would become a film within a film. This move will necessitate two other changes. The first is another funding body and why shouldn't the AFC be that body? Peter Sainsbury is talking about radical new departures and here is a golden and unrivalled opportunity to situate and explore the making of docs in the present conditions. The second change called for is a change of name. After all that has happened, it is impossible to go past the famous formula at the end of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: "...But some are more equal than others."

Curthoys

☆ from previous page

achievements and problems, but overall it strongly suggests the importance of trade union organisation if workers are to protect and improve their pay and conditions. It

Cold War of the 1950s, environmental and heritage issues in the 1970s, health and safety issues in the 1980s, and so on. I found it interesting, thought-provoking, and informative. It would certainly be useful as a discussion film for teaching purposes. My graduate students would probably be stern critics, but they would find plenty in *Amongst Equals* to stimulate debate both about Australian labour history and about the strategies and techniques of documentary

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Union film in illicit screenings

In scenes reminiscent of the early union movement of Tolpuddle Martyr days, when semi-legal meetings were held in darkened halls, a pirate copy of *Amongst Equals* has now been illicitly screened to two packed houses at the Australian Film Institute Cinema in Sydney. The second screening was followed by a seminar hosted by the AFI and the Australian Screen Directors Association.

A consensus resolution emerged at that meeting calling on the ACTU, Film Australia and Tom Zubrycki to get together to work out ways and means, including mutually agreed arbitrators, by which Tom could complete his film.

While this resolution appeared to give too much away to the ACTU officialdom, the mover (Bob Gould) believed it complied with Tom's wishes.

The seminar opened with short position statements from Tom Zubrycki, Bruce Moir (Film Australia), Professor Ann Curthoys, Michael Frankel (lawyer), Ian Millis (arts officer Miscellaneous Workers Union), Roger Hudson (ASDA) and Peter Duncan (ACTU arts officer).

With the exception of Bruce Moir, whose obfuscation was astonishing, two clear positions emerged early in the seminar. On

the one side were the advocates of "moral rights" who argued that as the original idea came from Tom and he was the actual filmmaker, then he should have been allowed to finish his film. This was the position of Tom, Ann, Roger, and Michael, who offered the information that in over sixty countries, including most of continental Europe, this moral right would have overriding legal force.

On the other side, the ACTU representatives took the position that the ACTU was the commissioner/sponsor and that it didn't get what it wanted and so was entitled to look elsewhere for someone to complete the project. According to them, and this has not been publicly contradicted, this is the view of the entire thirty-seven member executive although the executive has apparently been guided in its decisions by a six member sub-committee. Calls for the name of these six failed to elicit an answer.

The ACTU position failed to garner any support in the seminar but another, albeit minority, position did emerge, voiced by Graham Chase, Tom Manfield and Julie James-Balley. The first two named believed that the working arrangements, including right of final cut, should have been set out in a hard and fast contract so that everyone knew where they stood before the project started. This view was also supported by

Michael Frankel as a general rule for any kind of collaboration. "When people are working together on an artistic project they have to make legal agreements just as if they would if they were in business," Michael said.

When Tom was asked why he did not insist on a legal contract which set out everybody's rights and duties he said that he trusted in everyone's goodwill and believed he could work with the ACTU officials.

Julie believed the whole affair represented "a clash of cultures": between filmmakers used to the publicly funded film which allowed them large autonomy and sponsors who believed they should determine the content and style of the film. She believed mechanisms should be devised to resolve these kind of clashes.

Part of the reason for the lack in rigour in this project could lie with the idiosyncratic way the funding authority for this film, the Australian Bicentennial Authority, operated, in at least some cases. Michael Frankel related how one of the film boards conducted its meetings: the chairman did not want any decisions made "under stress", so there were regular breaks for meditation (one wonders whether decisions were preceded by Om chants?).

HG

☆ See screenings schedule on page 5

Location united front

To deliver a picture of Australia as full of great locations, the Film Finance Corporation, the Australian Film Commission, the state funding bodies, the Screen Production Association of Australia and Actors Equity will have joint representation at Location Expo in Los Angeles from March 2 to 4. They will have a combined space at the Expo location, which has been described as "the Easter Show in a hotel ballroom", where display material for Australia and for the individual states will be on show.

Michael Crosby, Equity federal secretary, believes that everyone can present a united front, as, despite the current dispute with SPAA, Equity's policy regarding overseas producers in Australia is clear and favourable. There is a view overseas that Equity is tough and nasty, and he'll be pleased to be able to dispel that impression personally. "Only one day has been lost to industrial action in eight years," he says.

Overseas producers attending Location Expo initially want to find out about "lakes and streams", but after that they want to talk to people who make decisions, to find out how much everything costs, and what sort of production levels Australia can support. On the key element of costs, Australian representatives at Expo believe they can paint a very attractive picture. *Mission Impossible* were saving twenty to twenty-five percent on their budgets by working in Australia, and that was at the height of the boom. Negotiated rates are now way down. All members of the delegation will be determined to present Australia as an attractive and stable production environment.

Equity commercials agreement

Extensive negotiations between Equity and the Commercial Film Production Association, the organisation representing Australian

producers working in the advertising sector, have resulted in a new collective agreement covering performers and extras working in foreign commercials shot in Australia.

Equity and the producers had been at loggerheads for eighteen months following Equity's decision to require all foreign advertisements to be produced under the Screen Actors Guild Advertising Agreement, a decision that producers claimed was a significant factor in the dramatic downturn in production levels of foreign commercials shot in Australia. Previously there had been no agreement covering foreign commercials, and production companies offered performers contracts which gave the advertiser the right to use the artist's image indefinitely, with no additional income payable to the performer, a practice rejected by the international acting community.

The new Agreement includes a minimum hourly rate, a detailed re-use structure for all territories and media, and a maximum life of 21 months for all commercials.

Public Forum on AFC

The public forum at which concerned members of the film community can continue the debate on the role and policy of the Australian Film Commission, which *Filmnews* foreshadowed last issue, will now take place towards the end of March, which is the earliest date we could arrange to have both Cathy Robinson and Peter Sainsbury attend. Think up your questions, be ready to have your say. Date, time, and venue in March *Filmnews*.

The ACTU vs Zubrycki: a denial of origins?

If the ACTU's lawyers and Tom Zubrycki can find a compromise, *Amongst Equals* will go to television. If they can't, this film history of the Australian trade union movement could be sent very far away indeed — to a workers' heritage centre in Barcaldine, Queensland, somewhere near Longreach and the Stockman's Hall of Fame. Banishment to the outback of Queensland seems like an index of ACTU displeasure with what was originally intended as an official documentary — 'a critical appraisal of the trade union movement in Australia suitable for a general audience on prime time television'. Recent screenings organised by Zubrycki, who doesn't hold copyright, are a measure of his frustration with the impasse that has kept *Amongst Equals* languishing unfinished for two and a half years.

It is rather difficult to understand why the work of a filmmaker committed to the principles of the trade union movement could need to be made to disappear. Witness Zubrycki's other films, which include *Friends and Enemies* on the SEQEB power dispute in Queensland, and *Kemira — Diary of a Strike* on the events which led to miners marching on parliament house in Canberra, or *Lord of the Bush*, which queries the development aspirations of Lord ('Basically I'm interested in the whole top end of Australia') McAlpine in the far north-west. Zubrycki was contracted by Film Australia (the producer of *Amongst Equals*) because of his reputation as a film documentarist of the labour movement.

The issues which underpin the ACTU position need consideration. It has claimed that the film doesn't reflect the breadth of membership opinion but upholds a 'narrow and romanticised' view. But is it possible to present the majority view of such a heterogeneous community as the ACTU? Would a majority view reflect the truth? How can you legitimately deny the 'reality' of one perspective when history writing is by nature a question of perspective?

The issue of documentary realism in film has been considered since at least the Russian revolution. Filmmakers have always cut and spliced, matched unmatched images and generally tinkered with their material to get it 'right'. What we may call *realism* in film is often simply the use of certain practices — hand-held camera work, for instance, or grainy film stock or a sudden pull on focus. Audiences have come to link the documentary 'look' with recognisable

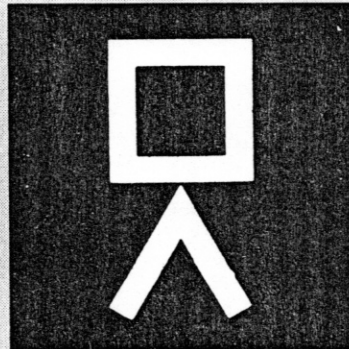
reality even though the decision to keep or discard footage might have been motivated by notions of what *looks* interesting as much as what is interesting.

I'm not suggesting that the way *Amongst Equals* was put together was governed by interesting looking images. Tom Zubrycki is a serious filmmaker. The scenes of actual struggle and the accounts of confrontations are not only the very stuff of the trade union movement's past, they are entirely filmic. They will keep audiences on their seats and won't prompt them to trail off elsewhere in search of more rewarding experience.

This film is considered by labour historians a responsible interpretation of 150 years of union movement history, reflecting on how it has contributed to and been an integral part of the development of Australian society. And it is fascinating to see this articulated as social history in interviews with the personalities — Jack Munday, Reg Mahoney, Sally Bowen and others — who contributed. Anecdotal evidence on the manufacture of the Owen sub-machine gun, on early days at Australian Iron and Steel, on the union reaction to pig-iron shipments to Japan and on the Rothbury disturbances, delivered by the people directly involved, is eminently more charming for an audience than being worked away at with an authoritative combination of image and voice-over. If the ACTU is concerned that the dramas of the past might reflect badly on its current self-image of a responsible mediator in the national interest, it needs to recognise that in suppressing this film it appears to be denying its origins.

In 1988 when this still unfinished film was nearing completion, the ABC was showing interest in buying the series, but hedged on the last section of the film (covering 1972 until the present, and including the prices/incomes accord and health and safety matters) saying that it was too uncritical. Zubrycki himself is also not happy with it because he feels he had to overcompensate at this point for ACTU dissatisfaction by underlining union achievements in the health and safety area.

Despite being recut with Professor Jim Hagan (who wrote the official ACTU history) as consultant, still the film does not fit with the preferred ACTU construction on events. Even if it never does, it would be a shame if the ACTU, with its record on civil liberties, stood in the way of public access to *Amongst Equals* — the finished film. ●



Safe from one's own mistakes

SIR: Australian insurance companies being required to contribute to others' mismanagement must rate as one of the most remarkable moves by the Hawke-Keating Government to date.

In effect, the Government is conditioning the Australian public to write giant "put" options on any area of mismanagement or fraud.

National Mutual's Gil Hoskins really hit the nail on the head when he expressed his fear that the Government was setting a precedent for the insurance industry to "support the mistakes of others" (*Financial Review*, January 30).

In a poorly disguised attempt to further socialise business and industry in Australia, Mr Keating is once again intervening to save a private company from the consequences of its own mismanagement.

While insurance is available for those who pay a premium to insure themselves against risk, it now seems that policy-holders will soon be forced to pay extra to insure others against their risks.

The proposed levy on insurance companies to cover recent shortfalls made by Regal Life and Occidental Life boils down to being a penalty payment on rival companies for being competitive and productive.

Quite simply, Mr Keating is relieving the directors and management of these two companies of their accountability to their own policy-holders, and forcing their competitors to assume this responsibility, a move which will of course be hardest hitting on shareholders and policy-holders around Australia.

If the Government is going to force companies to pay for the mistakes of rival insurers, there will soon be no need for any competition at all within the industry.

John Moore,
Liberal MP for Ryan,
Indooroopilly (Qld).

January 30

Has he seen the film?

SIR: Martin Ferguson, the secretary of the ACTU, made certain allegations and claims regarding *Amongst Equals*, my film on the history of the trade union movement (*Herald*, January 19).

Mr Ferguson obviously hasn't seen the movie. Had he seen it he would notice that one-third of it is devoted to the movement's work for white-collar workers, non-Anglo-Saxon workers,

Aborigines and women. Perhaps his real concern is the film's claim that, at certain points in its history, unions have been seriously out of step with the demands of exactly these groups.

No single film can ever encompass the full range of opinions and attitudes within the trade union movement. My starting point was to look at workers (both white- and blue-collar) and their experiences. There is nothing particularly radical in this approach. It has been followed by labour historians for the last 20 years.

The film does not underestimate the role of arbitration. Labour historians generally agree that between 1910 and 1950 major confrontations occurred, and that they did help to change the course of industrial history. To focus on arbitration at the expense of industrial action would be to reproduce official, institutional versions of that history - and the history of the ACTU isn't identical to that of the trade-union movement.

The ACTU approved the original script in late 1987. The actual film diverges very little from that script. Bicentennial funds were provided to produce a critical history of the trade union movement. In seeking to use those funds to promote its currently preferred self-images, the ACTU is arguably subverting those objectives. Where in all this is cultural democracy and historical honesty?

Tom Zubrycki,
Elswick Street,
Leichhardt.

January 23

Method of counting

SIR: Urban myths I have known: Adele Horin (*Herald*, January 23) and Lyn Burke (*Letters*, January 31) on our alleged declining and below replacement birth-rate.

Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics booklet, "Population Growth and Distribution in Australia", and updates, show that from 1946 to 1990 our natural increase has always exceeded 100,000 a year, and for the last 15 years has hovered between 125,000 and 140,000 trending up. Natural increase has exceeded net migration every year except for 1948 and 1949, and 1988 and 1989.

The main reasons for this widespread misinformation is that our census counts children per household not children per mother, ignoring separation, divorce and blended families.

Zero-Population-Growth,
Cliff Road,
Wollongong.

January 31

SMH 5.2.91.