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and television tend to take a negative, prohibitive approach. Typical of this is the FACTS draft code stating that a licensee **may not broadcast** (our emphasis) a program which is likely in all the circumstances to:

- seriously offend the cultural sensitivities of Aborigines or of ethnic groups or racial groups in the Australian community
- stir up hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule against a person on the grounds of race, colour, national or ethnic origin (*inter alia*).

Similarly, FARB's code specifies what shall not be broadcast but contains no stimulus to the broadcasting of a more rounded view of Australian society (though FARB has produced an extremely positive set of guidelines on portrayal of indigenous Australians - see story, p10).

It is interesting to contrast this approach with the SBS's codes of practice, which place the emphasis on what the broadcaster **should** do rather than what it should not, viz the following excerpts (our emphasis). The SBS, for example:

- seeks through its programming to counter attitudes of prejudice against any person or group;
- seeks to correct distorted pictures of ethnic communities and issues of race generally;
- aims to ensure that programs either counter or do not support individual and group stereotyping;
- aims to promote a greater awareness of the actual and potential contributions of women; and
- recognises the social and cultural integrity and pluralism of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies, and aims to facilitate an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and values among all Australians.

The Casting Issue

The issue of casting in television drama is central to this debate, and this

emerged at the conference as an area of confusion and misunderstanding. On one side are producers and writers, who often seem to think that it is enough to feature 'issues' concerning these groups, or to have one or two token characters drawn from them, or to include them among extras. On the other side are the communities themselves and the media unions, who argue that the scope and emphasis of drama must change to reflect the reality of Australian society, and that 'ethnic' and indigenous actors should not be cast only in roles which call for an actor from these groups.

Anne Britton of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance said that only two per cent of the available roles in mainstream drama went to indigenous or NESB actors. To illustrate the desirability of different approaches to casting, she showed a video made by the American stage actors union in which well known plays were recast using non-traditional actors - for example, two black women performing the roles in *Night, Mother* which are usually filled by whites.

The basis of non-traditional casting in the US is that ethnicity and gender should be ignored unless they are integral to the role - and only a minority of roles fall into that category, Britton said. Broadcasters are expected to collect casting data regularly and pass it to the union. If bias is observed, the parties have to sit down and discuss remedial strategies.

In the ten years 1981-91, non-traditional casting has increased from 11 per cent of roles to 23 per cent.

The ABC has admitted to casting problems and has undertaken a special study in co-operation with the Alliance. Britton said that advocates of non-traditional casting practices are not urging rigid political correctness, nor is it a backdoor way of introducing quotas. In Australia there tend to be cries of 'artistic freedom' whenever casting practices are mentioned, but producers cannot afford to be complacent about the current situation, which excludes people on the grounds of their race and ignores their talent.

James Davern of JNP Films, executive producer of *A Country Prac-*

tice, produced a long list of examples to illustrate that his company was enlightened on this issue. Unfortunately, the effect was often the opposite of what he intended, and many of his examples backfired. For example, he showed a scene (intended to highlight the generation gap in migrant families) between two 'Polish' characters - but they were played by Anglo actors Ben Gabriel and Danny Adcock.

He took issue with the research finding by Philip Bell that Anglo-Australian was the norm in soaps and to support this listed 'ethnic' characters in ACP (though some were ethnic only in name and were played by Anglos), and obtained a list of 'ethnic' actors from Grundys (defined by the fact that they had ethnic-sounding names).

Davern said that producers had to be careful in showing Aboriginal issues, for example, that the audience at home was not alienated.

A more salient example was the difficulty the producers had encountered in finding Iranian actors for an episode about Iranian refugees, because local Iranian actors feared reprisals against relatives still in Iran. Davern said this problem was 'typical' when trying to cast ethnic minorities.

The ABC's Michael Shrimpton mentioned that the policy of not re-using actors in the TV series *GP* made for casting difficulties when there was a small pool to draw on in the first place. He said however that when the ABC had made demands on its casting directors and writers, it had uncovered some great new talent. A major problem for NESB actors was a tendency to be over-awed and over-prepared, an overwhelming concern to 'do the right thing'. As a result the ABC was experimenting by mounting special training courses for groups of likely contenders, to help overcome these difficulties.

The ABC is planning a number of drama series on multicultural themes, including a China-Australia historical production spanning several decades, *The Wives of Quong*; *Bordertown*, set in a migrant camp; and *Burnt Bridge*, a series about Aborigines with an Aboriginal producer.

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