



Media Symposium Report: Macquarie University, 19 July

# Shock Horror: Network Backs Regulation

**Years of resistance to Australian content regulation by the commercial television networks seemed to be finally laid to rest when Seven Network Chief Executive and past chairman of the Federation of Commercial Television Stations, Bob Campbell, conceded at a recent symposium that Australian programming was central to the continued viability of free-to-air services.**

'We should say thanks in some part to the regulators and their foresight in forcing us to make Australian content', Campbell said, adding that Australian programs will be the driver for ongoing success in the new environment. Later, Campbell said the market would sort out the Australian content question, notwithstanding the ABA's 'worthy concern'. He believed that audiences were going to see more rather than less, with or without regulation. Drama does not equate with quality, he said, and said the view that we have to produce drama to properly reflect our cultural aspirations and heritage was 'rather myopic'.

Campbell was speaking for both the Seven Network and the pay TV aspirant Pay Television Australia (popularly known as the PMT consortium).

## Life Left in the FTA 'Dinosaur'

The seminar at which Campbell was speaking was held last month at Macquarie University Graduate School of Management. Participants conceded that free-to-air television will lose audience to pay TV services but said the existing networks will still be clear winners in terms of advertising revenue.

The consensus was that free-to-air television was not a dinosaur facing extinction, as implied in the rhetorical question posed in the title of the seminar. Bob Campbell said that in a multi-channel environment the debate was really about the complementarity between the expertise of the free-to-air providers and the new information chains. 'He who has the copyright wins', Campbell said. The focus should be on programming, not delivery; and Seven is well placed to be a major producer, copyright owner and distributor.

ABC Managing Director David Hill said that the ABC is the only player which 'is both the dinosaur and the new species'. He described the ABC as 'program rich/cash poor' - though it had received a distinct advantage in getting two free pay TV licences plus start-up funding. The details are still being negotiated, but Hill said that while the ABC

would continue providing comprehensive, quality free-to-air services, it would also provide for subscribers a 24-hour news and current affairs channel and a channel called *Extra* with 12 hours of quality children's programs during the day, followed by quality adult drama at night.

Hill said these channels will be bundled with other premium services, which caused media consultant Peter Cox to query whether this could be achieved, given that the Trade Practices Commission does not favour the basic/premium model. Hill was non-committal but said there were ways.

In answer to a question whether fine drama like *Brides of Christ* would be shown on the pay service before screening on free-to-air, Hill repeated the ABC's longstanding claim that the two services will be entirely separate and all the pay-TV arrangements will be transparent. The free-to-air service will still commission and produce programs, and if the pay service wants first-run programs it must produce and commission separately. Not one dollar from ABC free-to-air will flow to ABC pay, Hill claimed.

## SBS As Entrepreneur

Malcolm Long, Managing Director of SBS, said that free-to-air television will be transformed in the new environment. The medium has the ability to provide programming in a 'digest' form as opposed to the surfeit of programs which will be available on pay TV. 'The key to pay TV is to sell subscriptions whether people watch or not. You are not selling an audience as is the case with free-to-air TV', he said. The latter will be characterised by more localism, more infotainment, more studio-based programming, less international programming and fewer movies.

Digital compression will be available to terrestrial channels and both Seven and SBS have plans for 'farming' the additional channels which will be made available within the bandwidth their current channels occupy. In addition to its current broadcast TV service, SBS is interested in subtitled narrowcasting, paging, a yellow pages, a TV guide, an airline flight guide and a channel for downloading video games and software.

The central question for pay TV providers is how big a minority audience they can command, according to Laurie Patton from Continental Century, the company behind

*Continued on page 7 ...*



... Continued from page 6

satellite pay TV licence A. He too agreed that the existing television sector did not face extinction. While the pay TV licensees are not allowed to source programs jointly, they will be collaborating to develop a uniform subscriber management system. People want more of what they already like and pay TV's advantage is that it can deliver to people what they want to watch when they want to watch it. Continental Century will definitely be targeting local Australian audiences, Patton said.

## Home Video Hits US Pay TV Hard

FACTS director Tony Branigan, speaking on behalf of Bruce Gyngell, claimed that, in the US, the spread of home video has brought growth in premium pay services to a halt. In the US, basic cable, which carries ads and is offered at reasonable subscription charges, has been the engine for pay services.

Basic cable will not translate well in Australia. The cost of 'naturalising' it will be prohibitive. In order to overcome competitive difficulties, pay operators will have to become aggressive bottom-line oriented businesses - as the Australian networks already are. The networks are determined to evolve to provide a new diet, in a new climate, Branigan said.

Other media, such as newspapers, are likely to be more fragmented by the new services than is the existing TV industry. Branigan said that broadcast TV in 10-15 years will be the most dominant advertising medium. In fact TV revenue from ads may grow relative to other media, from 35 per cent currently to 40 per cent in 10 years, because of the effects of the new environment on other media. □

Barry Melville



## CU Book Review

# RACIAL STEREOTYPING AND OTHER MEDIA DISTORTIONS

Jakubowicz, Goodall, Martin, Mitchell, Randall and Seneviratne

*Racism, Ethnicity and the Media*, Allen and Unwin, 1994, ISBN 1 86373 364 7. \$24.95.

**That the media present a distorted image of Australian society and at times propagate racist stereotypes would not be news to most readers.**

*Racism, Ethnicity and the Media* is the result of a major study of the Australian media undertaken in the late eighties and early nineties by Jakubowicz et al from the University of Technology, Sydney. The focus is on representation in the mass media, i.e. television, radio, newspapers and popular magazines. The study uses a multidisciplinary approach to address some fairly tough questions about how cultural diversity and social difference are represented, whether there is conscious manipulation and whether media representations replicate social power structures.

Using media content analysis, interviews with media workers, discussion groups and media diaries to collect primary data, the media and racism project then overlaid cultural studies analyses to arrive at some damning conclusions. The analysis turns on race, ethnicity, gender and class, while acknowledging that these dimensions may seem out-of-date to proponents of post-modernism.

Coincidentally the book has come out at the same time as the Advisory Note on Portrayal of Cultural Diversity put out by the Federation of Commercial Television Stations (FACTS). The Advisory Note is a self-regulatory guideline aimed at preventing discrimination and stereotyping on commercial television. It may discourage the worst excesses of discrimination and stereotyping but being subordinate to the industry's obligatory Code of Practice, it lacks teeth and can do little to change industry practices. FACTS would do well to read this book.

For the reader, *Racism, Ethnicity and the Media* is a textual patchwork with its multiple authorship and diverse modes of investigation. Problems in the various sectors of the media are rigorously identified and criticised, but from a policy perspective, the book lacks conclusions and recommendations. Still, this is an important work which backs up analysis with plenty of instances of the media being blatantly offensive, paternalistic or culturally insensitive. The book, as part of the Australian Cultural Studies Series will be valuable for academics and students. It also deserves serious attention from media players and public policy makers. □

Barry Melville