

Submission from Ted Roberts, scriptwriter and author

If it were not for the Australian Writers Guild, there would be no quota of Australian content in Australian Television, and little or no Australian film industry. The Guild, collaborating with the Screen Directors Association, the Screen Producers Association, and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, fought, argued, lobbied, voted and worked to ensure that at least a percentage of Australian air-time would be filled by Australian content rather than American salted with a little British. The fight goes on, and each day heavy forces are marshalled by Governments and by powerful media bosses to pull back or eliminate the privilege of Australians being able to experience their own culture on their airwaves. It is infinitely cheaper for Networks to purchase American programmes, particularly drama and comedy programmes, than to buy the home-grown product.

When I was producing "Water Rats" in Sydney, and it was consistently the top-rating drama show on air, the budget was reduced each season until we were finally making it for around \$A400,000 an episode. An American television series of the time such as Hill Street Blues was made for between \$US 1,000,000 and \$1,500,000. This means that an American producer has five to eight times (often more) than his Australian counterpart to produce his show. So he can pay more to his writers, allowing them to work longer, and exclusively, on the show, buy more expensive actors, allow directors more preparation time, allow more time for editing, set building, etc. It also gives them the luxury of shooting for ten, twelve, or fifteen days an episode. In Australia we must shoot two episodes concurrently in ten days or blow the budget.

But in spite of the size of their budgets, American shows usually recoup their costs and go well into profit within America, due to their huge population. The rest of the world then becomes an ancillary market, allowing them to sell into places like Australia for a fraction of the cost of an Australian programme. If your only real interest is making a profit, which product would you prefer to buy and sell? Ask the Australian Networks.

It became apparent to me that the Guild was an essential part of Australian Screen writing way back in "Skippy" days. No residuals were ever paid writers for "Skippy", though it has been sold on and on all around the world for almost thirty years. God knows what the production company made from my scripts, but it was a bloody lot more than the \$750 that I had thought so generous when my head was still in the clouds.

I oppose any change to the current provisions in the Copyright Act over the parallel importation of books. The present regulations are good ones and should be retained for the benefit of Australia.