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REVELATIONS:

SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

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The article presented here is an expanded version of a talk given by Dr. Witton on the ABC Broadband program on May 9, 1977.

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One of the major effects of the recent revelations about CIA involvement in the internal domestic politics of Australia is that it demands that we all think about the ways in which our society, its politics and its culture, may have been affected by the Americans and by their allies on the right wing of Australia's political spectrum.

Let me try to show what I mean. 1977 has

already seen the publication of an important and stimulating book on Australian society. The book, **Ruling Class, Ruling Culture** (Cambridge University Press) was written by Bob Connell, the newly appointed Professor of Sociology at Macquarie University. There are few people who have Connell's wide-ranging knowledge and sensitivity to make sense of the manner in which capitalism has developed in Australia

and to establish the way that Australia's ruling class maintains its control over Australian society, culture and politics. In the conclusion of the book, Connell discusses two historical moments in Australian post-war history when the rightwing forces of Australia engaged in massive mobilisation to trounce the forces of reform and change. The first of these was during the anti-bank nationalisation campaign of 1947-1949 which culminated in the dramatic electoral defeat of Labor. As Connell points out:

In the late 1940s a conservative political mobilisation occurred on a scale unprecedented since the first world war. A co-ordinated, expensive and dramatic propaganda campaign was launched against the Labor government by the business and political leadership of the ruling class. In 1949 the conservative parties swept back to federal office where, with a temporary interruption by the Whitlam government, they have remained ever since. In the 1950s and 1960s the remaining State Labor governments were picked off one by one: for a short period at the end of the 1960s there was no Labor government anywhere in Australia, a situation that had not been known for half a century. (p.208).

Connell's observations, I believe, force us to reconsider what role the Americans may have had in Australia's internal political development. He points out that the electoral campaign of 1966 was in many ways as significant as that of 1949 in its capacity to destroy the electoral hopes of Labor and of the left. The 1966 campaign was, of course, fought mainly around the issue of Viet Nam and was one in which the American government had a vital interest.

Well, given this observation, what relevance do the recent CIA revelations have? First, we must realise that if, as the former top-level CIA officer Marchetti claims, there were at least 20 or 30 "deep cover" or "clandestine" CIA operatives working in Australia during the latter half of the 'sixties and into the 'seventies (*The Sun*, May 4, 1977), then it would be naive to imagine that they would not work with the right against the left in Australia.

Moreover, the successive electoral defeats of Labor during the second half of the

'sixties indicate that if these were achieved with the assistance of the CIA, then the CIA had probably learnt much from their activities throughout the world where the overthrow of governments and funding of rightwing political parties had become standard fare. However, this period in Australia has particular relevance for other reasons. We already had a large number of US military, intelligence and communications bases on our soil and 1966-68 was a crucial time for the construction of the vital Pine Gap installation. It was finally completed about 1969 or 1970 and the now confirmed CIA officer (and friend of Doug Anthony), Richard Lee Stallings was then the officer in charge of the Pine Gap installation.

At the same time Australia was a major, if somewhat symbolic, ally of the US in Viet Nam. Of course, other things were happening at that time as well. In the late 'sixties, Australia saw a massive inflow of American investment. This was highlighted at that time by a top level US investment conference sponsored in Australia by the Stanford University's highly influential Stanford Research Institute, or SRI. The SRI carries out top level, often highly classified and intelligence related, research for the Pentagon and the American intelligence community, as well as for American corporations.

This conference in Sydney was attended by some of the top US corporate leadership; businessmen whose gigantic multinational corporations dispose of annual funds far in excess of many national budgets of third world nations and whose multinational corporations often provide "cover" to CIA agents working abroad. People like this do not descend on a country lightly and it is significant that they chose the late 'sixties for their conference. About the same time, the Liberal-Country Party cabinet actually had a closed session meeting with top level executives of another body representing the highest levels of US corporate power. This body, Business International, is an American corporate organisation which has the resources and co-ordination at its disposal to organise US corporate support for, or destabilisation against, governments throughout the world. The fact that a national cabinet would meet it in closed session indicates a considerable degree of

close co-operation between the two.

Also in the late 'sixties we had at least one very suspicious labor conference. It was sponsored by the International Confederation of Petroleum and Chemical Workers, a body which has since been unmasked as but one of the international labor organisations which have used CIA funds to promote rightwing trade union influence in countries such as Australia. This conference was held at the University of NSW and no doubt at the time may have seemed innocent enough, although the strong role of rightwing Australian trade unions in the conference should surely have alerted many people to the fact that neutrality of the conference seemed dubious at least. However, if people such as Mr. Edward St. John, QC, can find only now (Sydney Sun, May 4, 1977) that a body such as the International Commission of Jurists has been manipulated through CIA funding, how many other people and organisations will need to examine the role they may have played, wittingly or unwittingly, in furthering the interests of the US in Australia and throughout the world? Hence the interest in Sir John Kerr's association with LAWASIA, another organisation that used CIA funds. Often these connections are found out through mere chance. For example, in the early 'seventies, I myself heard that there were plans to set up in Australia a rightwing organisation to be called Peace with Freedom. At the time, I recalled that I had heard the name before and, sure enough, by fossicking around a bit, I found that the US magazine *Ramparts* had, in the late 'sixties, written an article which mentioned that the CIA had funded an organisation by that exact name in Africa. It is just too much to believe that this name was picked out quite at random by rightwing Australians.

However, to return to the observations of Bob Connell mentioned earlier, we must now begin to investigate the way in which events that have thus far been viewed as almost solely within the Australian political arena may have been either set up, manipulated or used by the US and its intelligence organisations. For example, with the revelations of Marchetti and Boyce, the actions of rightwing trade unions in the Ermolenko affair in Perth gain new significance. What about the whole cold-war



era that was ushered in, as Connell points out, by a massive campaign against Labor and the left? What about the Petrov trial? What about the Communist Dissolution referendum in the early 'fifties? How much were these events orchestrated from Washington? We know that people like Dulles visited Australia during that period. What plans were hatched during such visits? How many lower level CIA officers and operatives moved around Australia influencing Australian events? In *Broadband* on May 2, 1977, Mark Aarons was able to reveal the crude opinions of CIA operative and trade union leader Harry Goldberg following his 1960 visit to Australia because Goldberg was stupid enough to lose a copy of his report which then found its way into the hands of the Australian trade union movement. (See *Tribune*, May 11, 1977.) How many other reports have gone to the US unrevealed and have helped formulate plans of manipulation and control in Australia?

Let us just consider the reports of the now proven CIA labor attaches that have worked out of the Melbourne US consulate. What sort of work is being carried out at this very moment by the present US Labor Attache Arthur Purcell who has worked for the US in areas such as Latin America? Former CIA officer Philip Agee in his book on the CIA has laid bare the dirty tricks that CIA agents have played in Latin America, particularly with union leaders. We do not, of course,

know whether Purcell is actually CIA or not, though it would be hard to understand why we should have a succession of CIA officers in that post and then suddenly not have one. But in any case, it would be hard to believe that the function of the post has changed or that the post acts any differently in Australia than in Latin America, except of course that funds are presumably not used here for assassination of leftwing leaders as in Latin America. Rather, the post probably uses more subtle and appropriate tactics. Thoughts such as these make the reports — such as that referred to by John Hurst in the *Nation Review* of May 5-11, 1977 — of possible CIA blackmail, both political and sexual, of Australian labor leaders, highly relevant.

A whole new dimension to our understanding of CIA activities in Australia came with Humphrey McQueen's excellently documented account of the funding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom, also in *Nation Review* (May 5-11, 1977). That so many of our literary, academic and cultural elite could be implicated from just this one organisation makes one begin to wonder what would be the result of having further files from the myriad of moderately well-funded rightwing organisations that have appeared, sometimes just temporarily, on the Australian scene. It is unlikely we are ever going to have the wealth of detail such as that unearthed on the Congress for Cultural Freedom by the ever vigilant Humphrey McQueen. Nevertheless, it is of equal importance to identify the effect that the funding of rightwing cultural and political commentators have had on Australian social thought.

The files used by McQueen reveal how easily the CIA and its rightwing friends had access to organs of influential Australian opinion, such as the *Current Affairs Bulletin* and other journals, as well as to universities and bodies such as the Institute of International Affairs, the Institute of Political Science in Australia, and the WEA. As well, we have been shown in this stunning review by McQueen the way that pressure was put on Australian daily newspapers when occasionally they erred and actually had leftwingers or liberals review books. Moreover, Anne Summers' and Paul Kelly's observation in the *National Times* (May 9-14, 1977) that there would appear to be an

almost total news clampdown on the really sensational revelations of the last fortnight — with the startling exception of the *Sydney Sun* — confirms one's general feeling, backed up by McQueen's evidence, that the Australian press is a close and loyal ally to the American corporate takeover of Australia's economy and culture.

So, what views in, and of, Australia might be seen as those which have either come from, or are reinforced by, the CIA and its friends in Australia? At a crude level, these views would obviously include views such as the following:

- That unions are to blame for Australia's economic ills, rather than the view that, as we become more and more integrated into the world capitalist system, we will be more and more at the mercy of economic forces over which we have no control.

- That Australians have no economic initiative and that we should be grateful to American corporations for coming to invest here, rather than the view that the Americans have succeeded in taking over almost every profitable sector of our economy and are ripping off the Australian economy and people at an almost obscene rate. And so on

There are even more subtle views that have been promoted in Australia and it is here that the CIA's friends in the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and in our universities, have played a particular role. These views would include, for example, the following: that Australian culture is parochial and sterile and that the only way we can develop culturally is to open our culture and society to international forces, and particularly to the so-called vibrant culture of the US in the same way as our economy needs to be "opened up". This results in a general downgrading of the status and value of Australian poets, novelists, musicians and artists, and a celebration of every visiting celebrity brought out — perhaps we can guess now by whom — from the US. This means that we see, for example, the often nonsensical modern art and sculpture displays regularly sponsored in Australia by the New York Museum of Modern Art, and stand in awe before the social products of another society and culture. We send our best talent to the US to become alienated from our society and they come back as men and women of the

world, but not of Australia. How often do we see Australian plays, and particularly ones of critical social comment, on the stages of our leading theatre companies, compared to foreign, particularly American, plays? Due to the smothering effect of the US film industry, distributing through US-owned cinema chains, we are only now seeing the incredible talent of our own film makers who have languished for years with only the work of making TV advertisements (usually for American products) to keep them from completely losing their talent. And even now, we find that Australian films must look towards the eventual American market before they can find backers (often American). And to add insult to injury, the films occasionally have to tolerate American lead actors, such as Richard Chamberlain of the TV doctor series fame.

To mention television makes one immediately think not only of the dismal fare we adults face each evening, but also of our children who daily view the cultural trash of another country while US companies bombard them with sickening advertisements. The same cultural invasion has, of course, also occurred in the book industry. We have seen the virtual collapse, and US takeover, of the Australian publishing industry and the cold war warriors of such bodies as the Congress for Cultural Freedom have rationalised this by pointing out the cultural superiority of international (mainly American) writers and international (mainly American) ideas. In the future, we are likely to hear less and less of Australia in books and novels unless the ideas are acceptable to the US publishing houses or deal with what they see as "non-parochial" subjects in order that there will be a market for them in the US and throughout the US empire of communications.

It is thus in the realm of ideology, of how we view ourselves, our culture, our history, our politics and, most importantly, our future, that the Americans, through the CIA and through those who see themselves as the guardians of the American way of life in Australia, will continue to try to control us. It is indeed a tribute to Australian culture that so much exciting cultural and social creativity is still occurring in Australia. However, we must, with the recent revelations, be aware that our cultural and social existence is at present being contested

and that the struggle to gain national autonomy will be a long and hard one. It is the revelations of the recent period that form a watershed in our political history. Despite the protestations and stonewalling of the right, there is indeed machinery in existence in Australia to maintain the US's economic and cultural domination of our lives and there's no doubt that our own intelligence community works closely with the Americans to maintain this domination in which Australia's own ruling class plays a vital role.

The relevance of this to the mobilisation against the Whitlam government even before it got to power (*Dissent*, Melbourne, No. 29, 1972, *The US and Australia*), as well as when it was ousted (*Sun*, May 9, 1977), deserves considerable examination. It is my belief that more and more Australians will be moved to help expose the CIA and its allies in Australia and to begin to create an Australian culture and politics that will overcome the barriers that have been consciously constructed to thwart our autonomous national development.

However, the struggle will be a long and hard one. The gigantic US corporations that are here mean business, just as they did in Chile. And we have twice as much US investment in Australia than did Chile. What can these companies do? Well, for example, in Chile ITT financed and assisted much of the CIA's activities. In Australia why wouldn't it do the same to safeguard its investment? Thus, in Australia, ITT, through its ownership (among other things) of STC, controls a part of Australia's telecommunications industry, obviously a vital asset in terms of intelligence monitoring and surveillance. It would be naive and absurd to maintain that a corporation threatened by similar forces to those that opposed it in Chile would not use its powerful position in its own interest. Moreover, bodies such as the American Chamber of Commerce in Australia play a role in co-ordinating the activities of these giant multinationals.

But their task is far less easy than it was in the 'sixties and it is my belief that their task will become an increasingly difficult one. The revelations of the recent past and the increasing popular interest in them both here and abroad, confirm this fact.