

To the Editor, *Senate inquiry of cuts to the A.B.C. Broadcaster's chat coverage!*

More than a week ago at 7pm, I settled, as per usual, in my lounge chair to watch the news and 7.30 report without a hint of what was in store for me and other countless viewers of ABC television. This was television viewing at its most shocking. It was personally upsetting, and at the same time with a rapidly growing realisation of being witness to the instant best ever emotionally charged news production experienced. This was led by a remarkable lady presenter, who along with board members, with controlled emotions, announced the ABC helicopter crash which killed a number of their most senior iconic journalists. The journalists who gathered with little time and of the highest quality, footage of the individuals who lost their lives, need to be commended for their most emotionally challenged reporting. All of this for almost all the ½ hour news followed by a full half hour of the 7.30 Report with its Presenter, the iconic Kerry O'Brien, giving his best ever.

To me, an almost 82 years old ex German Migrant, the ABC very early on became my informing educator, first with 3LO permanently fixed on the dial of my work radio as a sub contracting bricklayer. LO opened a new world for me, not only with clear English easy to understand and learn but by its covering of all the important subject matters in the World of Politics, Economics, Culture and Australian perspective.

When television appeared, the ABC and SBS became my Universities, together with life experience and all played an even more enhanced role in life. No wonder the news touched me so much as one of these Journalists had been, over quite some time, being the Presenter I had watched over the years and considered a respected friend whom I never met face to face. These early inputs helped to develop a growing awareness of the concept of "Social Justice" kindled even further back during childhood and teen time in the period of the second world war in Nazi Germany with its bombing of civilian population which I experienced living in Hamburg when it was destroyed through phosphorus firestorm created by stick bombs. The lifelong recognition of the futility of war grew out of that and expressed itself much later here in Australia being involved in the peace movement during the cold war years.

From its inception and all through the Menzies Federal government years the ABC remained a publically owned fully funded and totally independent media organisation in a sea of commercial organisation owned, controlled and used to represent their interest.

In later decades politicians of both sides didn't always like critical analysis and reporting and eventually tried to find ways to curb the above somewhat. During the time of the Howard Government this became much more direct. The strategies used were, steady and continual defunding over the years and as vacancies occurred on the board of management people more sympathetic to the government aims were found as replacements. One famous example was the replacement of a retiring chairman with a person so strong and obvious, in endeavours to weaken the independence of board's decision making that public opinion became outraged forcing the government to let him resign and finding a replacement able to be much more discreet and nuanced.

The Rudd Gillard Government made some positive changes. It reappointed a staff representative to the board removed by the previous one and recently appointed 2 women with an excellent track record. It also increased funding to some extent but nowhere like the money needed to rebuild its previous strength capability and program making.



The Murdoch news Corporations Australian newspaper circulation is almost 70%. As in England a powerful concentration of commercial media ownership including the threat it poses to public broadcasters. News Corporation is trying to buy another commercial media corporation which needs government approval to some extent.

Commercial media encouraged it by clever manipulation of the body politics creating a strong dependence on them. The Murdoch News Empire was and is the biggest player in this regard not only here but right around the world as is very much in evidence, big time at the moment. The Community Organisation "Friends of the ABC" came into existence around the same time as the above mentioned and I have been a member a number of years.

Friends of the ABC consequently became another section of my University and life experience. This came from the offices established in all State Capitals and the work they do through paid staff and volunteers, gathering together in great depth and detail what is happening in the world of media here, and around the world, and publishing it in our 4 quarterly "news and views"

The role of the thousands of members is to disseminate this wealth of information by sharing it within their local social circle, family friends and all other opportunities.

The reasons for writing this letter to the editor is to first extend my sympathy to staff and boards of the ABC for the tragic loss of their colleagues, secondly that through my own story tell of the importance of public media, thirdly to encourage readers to join Friends of ABC if so inclined or just write to the Australian Government to let them know you want its action to achieve strong media ownership diversity, to ensure our culture shines and our democracy is uncompromised.,

And lastly my thanks to the Traralgon Neighbourhood House staff for their help in typing this letter for me.

Wolfgang Heuer

The only time I watch television, during the day is Sundays because of "Gandhi" and the afternoon coverage of Messaye Strick and dot notation. And of course I am "Musicians"!