

Dear Australians,

I am an author, and next month I will publish two books. This probably is fortuitous because the Australia - US Free Trade Agreement if promulgated could stultify my aspirations to write Australian novels and short stories for Australians and others in the World. Although I have been an expatriate Australian in an export consultancy capacity for many years, I remain a passionate Australian. I am looking forward to retirement from my present work in a year or two, and had hoped to take up my new career as a writer. Incidentally, I wanted to do this in Australia, not in state of the United States of America.

Increasingly, I find myself as an egalitarian Australian, out of step with the US and Australian governments' dogmas. The former of "apparent freedom", violence, and increasingly right-winged oppression of ordinary people both in the US and in other countries. The latter of blind faith in an inconstant companion. The US humanitarian record is wanting.

The rich and powerful U.S.A. has for years, unwittingly or otherwise, manipulated nations, economies and people's attitudes. Which countries you might ask? Well, you could try Burma, China, Indonesia, Korea, Lao PDR, Viet Nam, Granada, Haiti, Chile, The Congo, Nicaragua, Iraq, Thailand, Australia, Turkey, and Cuba, amongst others. Little New Zealand, however, has maintained its independence, to the great shame of others.

The U.S.A. has not sought territory since Teddy Roosevelt gave that kind of imperialism away, except maybe for some obscure islands in the Indian Ocean about which no one other than the former inhabitants has heard. Instead, it gradually has extended its grip over the World's economy, obliging all nations to adhere to its chosen system, and it underwrites its choices with military power. 'The business of America,' said Herbert Hoover, obedient to his masters, 'is business.' So the U.S.A. today produces 22% of the World's gross domestic product and is responsible for 36% of 'defence' spending. Ironical as it sounds after the 11th September 2001, the U.S.A. has made a lot of the World peaceful and prosperous. Much of Europe though reacts badly to the U.S. government's assumption that its values can be applied universally. The French socialist who called Disneyland in Paris a 'cultural Chernobyl' was not entirely alone in his views. The environmental protesters who see GM foods being forced on unwilling populations are not isolated dissidents. I do not want a 'cultural Chernobyl' in my country thank you.

The proposed Australia - US Free Trade Agreement will trade away our national sovereignty and will not allow us to adapt and respond to the future. Only Blind Freddy could think that the U.S. government and 'connected' U.S. business interests will allow us in the future to increase the level of regulation of pay TV and other new media. The proposed agreement will hand-over our cultural policy to Hollywood. Australians need to be in a position to respond to coming changes rather than react to changes as they arrive. Changes in the media are no different, moreover, they are most important because of the power of the media to influence people's thinking.

Our greatest resource, our children, through the proposed agreement, will be put at risk as childrens' programming will be out of our control. Is our present government

happy with a maximum 4% of childrens' programming being available on Pay TV?
Do they want to see future Australians brought up as pseudo-Americans. God forbid.
We have thrown our own culture on the table for the richest bidder.

I have listened to reports in the media and have read widely on the thrust of the agreement, and as an Australian, I am thoroughly disgusted. I join my friends from the U.S.A. (Surprise! I am not Xenophobic!), and many friends from other countries, in denouncing this kind of acceptance of cultural imperialism. I will vote with my conscience in the hope that our next government will be Australian, for this one is not.

In the mean time, RECORD MY OPPOSITION AND DISGUST AT THE VERY MENTION OF THIS AGREEMENT. QUOTE MY WORDS AND REMEMBER THAT THE ELECTORATE COMPRISES MANY INDIVIDUALS' PREFERENCES, AS WELL AS A COLLECTIVE VIEW. THE ELECTORATE IS NOT STUPID!

I will circulate my views to all my Australian colleagues and friends and urge them to oppose this un -Australian proposal.

Rex Kinder
AUSTRALIAN Author