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SPEECH NOTES FOR THE PRIME MINISTER,

THE HON. E.G. WHITLAM, QC, MP,

FOR THE OPENING OF THE FILM AND TELEVISION SCHOOL,

NORTH RYDE, N.S.W., 22 AUGUST 1975

1. I give full credit to John Gorton for recognising the needs of the Australian film and television industry. We agree on the need to develop an industry of world standard. We agree that a flourishing film and TV industry is possible only with a pool of expert trained technicians and craftsmen, of creative producers, directors and scriptwriters. That is what this school is providing - along with lectures, seminars, workshops and information on all aspects of film and TV production for those involved in the industry.
2. It is seven years since a school such as this was first proposed at a UNESCO seminar on film and TV training at the University of N.S.W. I am proud that my Government was able to follow up these initiatives and establish the Film and Television School as an independent statutory authority in 1973. The School has the same status as a college of higher education. Eight months ago you invited me to open the first full-time three-year course of the School. I regret that I was not able to be with you on that occasion, but I know that the first courses have successfully begun. It is a very select group - only 24 students a year - it's smaller than the Cabinet - but those men and women have been carefully chosen and will be trained to the highest standards of excellence, of professionalism.
3. Professor Toeplitz and your Council have recognised the essential truth that the Australian film and TV industry can only survive and prosper by producing works of international quality. There is no room for mediocrity. Here you have the very finest equipment and technical facilities; by 1980 you will have a permanent new building at Macquarie University. But none of these things will be of much value if the standards of professional training are inferior. The success of this School depends, not only on cultivating a technically stimulating atmosphere, but on attaining and insisting upon rigorous professional standards in all your work. Technical competence in film production is only apparent by its absence; its presence is taken for granted. Too often in Australian productions in the past we have been aware of a certain clumsiness, a certain roughness at the edges. It is difficult to pin down but we can recognise it. True excellence of style and technique must be taught and learnt the hard way. In film and TV productions it involves collaboration by many different people with many different skills. Here in this school you will have the benefit of working together and getting used to the discipline of working together. That is an essential part of the training this School provides.

4. Films and television are the authentic art forms of the 20th century - the most popular, and therefore also the most representative art forms, and those most closely attuned to the thoughts and feelings of the people. The problem is that they involve technical resources and expenditures beyond the reach of individuals or even of substantial private companies. Writing and painting and composing were solitary arts and could be practised in penury, but films and television require heavy investment and advanced technology. In the days when the technology was relatively simple and investments were modest Australia could afford a successful, and indeed flourishing, film industry. Overseas markets were limited, but the overheads were such that costs could be recouped and profits made from local exhibition. This is no longer the case. For years we heard demands and appeals for a viable film industry in Australia. These hopes were not fulfilled because Governments were never prepared to accept any responsibility for film production. It is only now that Governments are playing their part by subsidising film production and supporting their own production agencies. We now recognise that in a small or medium-sized country maintaining film production is like running an orchestra or an art gallery; it has little chance of succeeding without Government support. I am not suggesting that a profitable private industry is impossible. I am suggesting that without Government support a profitable industry is difficult to establish and unlikely to succeed. Moreover, it is only with Government support that films can be produced for a minority audience. There is less pressure on film makers to conform to cosmopolitan and frequently debased standards of popular taste. There is more scope for a distinctively Australian style.
5. We can all take satisfaction for the success of many recent Australian films. We have seen a healthy expansion of the Australian film industry in recent years. This has been due in large part to the involvement of governments. The Australian Government, as you know, has established, the Australian Film Commission as a statutory authority to promote a healthy Australian film industry. The Commission will incorporate Film Australian (the Government's film production unit) and the Australian Film Development Corporation - another offspring of the Gorton Government. The Corporation this year committed about \$1.5 million to Australian film projects.
6. The Labor Party is committed to a high level of Australian content in television production. We have established the Australia Council as an independent authority with its Film, Radio and Television Board to supervise Australian Government assistance to film and television projects. And now we have a fully-fledged Film and Television School to produce the qualified men and women that the industry will need. I am delighted to be with you to perform this opening ceremony. I congratulate the director, Professor Toeplitz and the council and staff of the School on the excellent start it has made. I am confident that it will make an indispensable contribution to the development of film and television in Australia.