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GENERAL SUBMISSION TO IPAN'S *THE PEOPLE'S INQUIRY*

My submission takes the form of a brief personal account of changes in my lifetime caused by the influence of the United States of America (US) on Australian life.

There are oodles of data and official documents to support statements I make, and IPAN's network would have these at their fingertips. So I present not a footnoted document, but a tale of a life lived during 70 years of accelerating US intrusion and control amounting to take-over. Indeed, 'invasion' would not be too strong a term.

I was born in 1950 in Adelaide. My parents were the first Australian-born generation of their mainly Irish, working class families.

In our district in Glenelg, a seaside town with its own character independent of inner Adelaide, daily interaction among neighbours was the norm – talking over the fence, exchanging garden produce, visiting each other's houses, often through shared backyard gates, to talk over cups of tea or help with repairs or other jobs. Commonly on a Friday or Saturday night, a cluster of neighbours would gather at someone's house to sing together around a piano or well-played harmonica. There was a genuine web of friendship among families residing within a block of two of each other. Of course, there were some sour connections but overall it was peaceful. It was safe for children, who made full use of the streets for group games, halting occasionally for a horse-drawn cart, vendor's van or car. There were not many motor vehicles in the 1950s, though during the next decade more families acquired cars.

The first televisions appeared in Glenelg electrical goods shops in 1959. Not surprisingly, on their evening walks adults and children alike would stop at the shop windows, fascinated by the colourful, busy images on the TV screens, or even just the 'test patterns'! A couple of people in our street acquired a television. Initially, they invited others to come and watch TV with them on a Saturday night. This put a small dent in the home gatherings of music players and singers. Then a few other families bought televisions (usually on 'time payment': that is, gradual purchase with an interest rate attached). They ceased to come to the sing-alongs or summer front-yard picnics. Within two years, our district's participatory, creative, shared entertainment ethic disappeared. This made a deep impression on me. I had loved the neighbourly gatherings and now felt that life was barer.

Now, someone might say that new electrical inventions like TV were inevitable, but it so happened that televisions as commodities came to us from United States manufacturers and they were immediately a conduit bringing into our homes North American dominant-society attitudes, values and myths about their past and present. These attitudes were imbued with white racism, triumphalism (settlers over indigenes; man over nature; USA over inferior cultures and regimes), and an utterly materialistic and ecologically ignorant vision of 'progress'.

(None of this is to suggest that pre-1950s Australia was fine. English colonisation of this land and its peoples had been crude and brutal. The white nationalism that followed is still alive and divisive, and structural injustice based on class and gender remained (and remain) a shameful heritage.)

Along with these cultural forces came intensified investment by US corporations in existing Australian industries but also in newer areas such as large-scale oil and mineral extraction, manufacture of motor vehicles, 'white goods' and soft-drinks, and agribusiness with its pesticides, fertilisers and monocultures (now known to have severely damaged our fragile soils). Moreover, US-made commodities were increasingly in our emporiums and on display at agricultural fairs. The trickle of highly refined

'convenience' foods (read 'health hazards') became a flood in grocery shops, which were soon to be glorified as 'supermarkets' knocking over local small, specialised traders until barely none were left by the late 1980s.

In the cultural realm, US ownership of film distribution enabled them to snuff out the burgeoning Australian film-making industry and give us a diet of American commercial films, often of low artistic value, that accelerated Australians' consumption of American dominant-culture norms, violence-as-a-way-of-life, and plain old propaganda in the form of 'historical' films and war stories. From the late 1960s, US content flooded our fiction, poetry and musical theatre markets. US corporations invested in book distribution chains, thus knocking out home-grown publishers and book-sellers and hence the publication opportunities for our authors, poets and composers.

Working for most of my life in community-based artistic and cultural activities, I witnessed these changes year by year, feeling them as a slow death of the existing vibrant ingredients of a people's culture, and as a shutting-down of possible paths for revitalisation. Our adults and children became addicted to television and then screen-based games, young people developed North American twangs in their voices and picked up each new wave of American colloquialisms. Our investigative journalists were edged out by foreign-dominated syndicated news networks, and ownership of Australian media outlets became monopolised, disallowing perspectives other than the prevailing neo-liberal, war-promoting orthodoxy of the last three decades. Just at a time when the deep knowledge, artistry and languages of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders are resurfacing against the odds and could profoundly influence constructive development in this country, the prevailing wind of foreign interests blows harder against them.

The last part of my sorry tale concerns 'defence'. Again, my personal story has been deeply affected by US influence on Australia. I was active in the 1960s-early 1970s anti-war, anti-conscription movement and was sentenced to prison for non-compliance with the so-called National Service Act. This Act was forcing ill-informed Australian youths to participate in the US attempt to take control of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

The US-Australian military connection in the Pacific Ocean late in World War Two has been hazed with sentimentality by successive Australian federal governments. The well-known facts, though, are that the US had its own designs on the Pacific for military and economic reasons, and moreover there is not a whit of evidence that the US would act in Australia's interests in a situation of threat from other sources. On the contrary, the record of US 'diplomacy by threat' and engineered coups on all continents provides a tonne of evidence that the US will subjugate Australia's interests to its own: witness the eight decades of sucking out profits; white-anting of the trade union movement; involvement in doing away with a popularly elected government (Whitlam's); the pressures on successive Australian governments to contribute cannon-fodder to their wars of invasion in Asia and the Middle East; the post-1960s US military bases making our country a target for nuclear attack by any nation or group bent on damaging US military communications and weaponry; and the last 30 years' build-up of US army, navy and air-force personnel in, especially, northern Australia.

Now, of course, Australia is being drawn into the US's self-defeating, belligerent stance against an economically surging China. This has already begun to bring Australia into disastrous conflict with China – conflict entirely avoidable if Australia were not co-manufacturing hostility as an agent of the US military-industrial-political regime.

Given the 70-year story I have presented, is this an alliance that's protective and profitable to Australia? Hardly. We have been reduced to pathetic servant-cum-minor-thug status. Let us not doubt that we are expendable once we've served our purpose. If a people's movement gathers momentum in Australia to question and change these arrangements, we may find that our lovable, longstanding 'ally' resorts to

military occupation of this country, perhaps disguised as a state of emergency declared by a servile federal cabinet. Certainly we must be vigilant against all imperialists, but at present let us especially deal with the imperialist we already have, who has plundered our resources, stunted our independent growth, thwarted innovative Australian green technology, made us internationally a diplomatic laughing-stock, and now prods us into large-power battles. As the old saying goes, 'Who needs enemies, when we have a friend like this?'

To conclude: change – technological and societal – may be inevitable, but the shape and content of change can be negotiated and directed by the parties involved, if they practise mutual respect and peer freedom to do so. De-regulation of the finance sector in Australia was not inevitable. Selling off profitable and protective state-owned enterprises such as the Commonwealth Bank, Wheat Board, Wool Corporation, Telecom, and National Rail Corporation was not inevitable. 'Globalisation' is not inevitable. In the digital computer era, globalisation has been a highly designed process intended to expand the reach of existing powerful corporations (and their ability to evade tax in any country). Associated free trade agreements rarely advantage weaker economies, as Australians can testify now that US businesses have rights in this country that were previously inconceivable and which allow them to compete with home-grown enterprises and tenderers, not least in the public infrastructure, human services, and dismembered post-secondary education spheres.

Now, as climate change and resource-scarcity threaten humanity, and as we are dragged into further impoverishment and self-destruction by politicians tied to the US's tail, we need more than ever an Australia independent of foreign control and parasitism; an Australia committed to genuine internal democracy, to vibrant cultural production and scientific inquiry undistorted by profiteering; an Australia valuing economic invention and advancement, healthy trade and peaceful relations with neighbours.

I hope I live long enough to see a popular movement grow in this direction. Thank you for the opportunity to offer this submission.