BROADCASTING, DEMOCRACY AND LOCALISM
A Study of Broadcasting Policy in Australia from the 1920s to the 1980s

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A dissertation
submitted to the
The University of Adelaide, South Australia
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 1987
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ABSTRACT

As a study in the political sociology of broadcasting in Australia, this thesis has dealt with changes in Australian broadcasting policy from the 1920s to the 1980s. These changes are conceptualised as a transition between two principles (Localism Type I to Localism Type II). It traces the expansion of Localism from Type I to Type II as the consequence of a political conflict between government, commercial broadcasting and special interest groups.

The transition from Localism Type I to II has involved a change in the conception of 'the audience'. Localism Type I conceived the audience simply as a geographical entity, whereas Localism Type II has perceived the audience as a complex set of sub-groups defined in terms of social characteristics. Localism Type II requires that the needs of audiences, in their smaller and larger fragmentations, should remain paramount in the programming concepts produced by all broadcasters. The commercial sector has largely failed to comply with both types of Localism in the servicing elements and as a consequence the public sector has assumed the greater burden of both programming activities.

These changes are attributed to three major causal factors. First, the state has intervened politically in the marketplace to impose controls over private sector activity and, when those measures proved inadequate, it created alternative, public-funded structures. Second, the failure of commercial broadcasters to comply with the conditions of licence (Localist Type II objectives in the servicing elements) has been the result of a marketplace logic. Third, changes in the concept of localism and broadcasting arrangements can be attributed to the influence of minority political groups who have struggled to define broadcasting objectives in broader social terms as opposed to private profitability. Following T.H. Marshall, the influence of minority political groups in public decision-making outcomes is conceptualised in terms of an expansion of citizenship.

The state has a structural interest in social unity since it is both a cause and effect of the disunity inherent in the tension between capitalism (a system of economic inequality) and democracy (a political system of formal, universal egalitarianism). The role of the state in a
liberal democracy lies in the space between the inequality of the economic system, and the formal equality embodied in the universalistic claims of the political structure.