

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Rule Tasmania!

by David Young

EXTRACT

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RULE TASMANIA was an attempt to interpret in local terms the type of conflict which has recently been taking place in Yugoslavia and the USSR. In other words, it takes a hypothetical look at what could happen if one of the Australian states were to declare its independence. The state chosen was Tasmania, partly for geographical and historical reasons, partly because that was the state in which the play was conceived and created.

I wrote the play for, and with input from, a group of grade 10 students at Rokeby High School, Tasmania, where I worked as an artist-in-residence for two days a week during term 2, 1991. I wanted to make serious a play, the students wanted, above all else, a comedy. RULE TASMANIA is therefore a somewhat tongue-in-cheek look at a very serious theme, the theme of civil war. But despite what I hope works as humour, there are serious undertones in the play; prejudice, stereotyping, the cultivation of hatred are all inevitable concomitants of the state-divided-against-itself, and they have their place in the script of this play. If other groups of young people choose to perform it, I hope they find the jokes to their taste, but I also hope that they don't neglect the play's darker side, the side which attracted me to the theme in the first place.

On a more practical note, the first production of the play was performed by a cast of seven girls and four boys. It would be difficult to produce it with a smaller cast, but the large number of characters could easily be distributed among a bigger group. On the technical side, Rokeby High School holds a copy of the sound tape, the slides and the words and music of the Tasmanian National Anthem (copyright Darren Glynn, 1991), which is referred to on page 5 of the script. If contacted, I am sure that the school would assist any other group contemplating a production of RULE TASMANIA. The only other technical point I would like to make is that the play should be performed very, very simply. A few chairs, a few tables and basic props are all that is needed. There are many scenes, and the action should flow from one to another as swiftly as it does in a television drama.

David Young, 1991

SCENE 1

SLIDE: "MAINLAND AUSTRALIA, 2001"
SLIDE: "THE FIFTH YEAR OF THE GREAT DROUGHT"
SLIDE: "SEVERE WATER RATIONING NOW IN FORCE"

LIGHTS UP ON A MAN AND A WOMAN SITTING EITHER SIDE OF A TABLE. ON IT A CARAFE OF WATER AND A GLASS.

MAN How much longer?

WOMAN (LOOKING AT WATCH) Only two hours.

MAN Two hours?!

WOMAN We've got to make it last.

MAN I can't wait two hours.

WOMAN If we drink it early, we'll run out, and we don't get any more till Sunday.

MAN (REACHING FOR CARAFE) I don't care!

WOMAN (GRABBING HIS ARM) No!

MAN Two days. One bucket of water for two days. It's not right.

WOMAN Everyone's in the same boat.

MAN Not in Tasmania, they're not. They've got plenty of water down there.

WOMAN Don't think about it.

MAN No water shortage down there. Bloody Tasmanians!

WOMAN So they're lucky.

MAN Then how come they're not offering to share with us.

WOMAN The Prime Minister's going to ask them, isn't she?
MAN She should be telling them!

WOMAN She will if she has to!

MAN She'd better! Bloody Tasmanians! Bludgers!.... How much longer now?

WOMAN One hour fifty nine minutes.

MAN God!

WOMAN We've got to make it last.

MAN Yeah, you said... Bloody Tasmanians!

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2

SLIDE: "PARLIAMENT HOUSE: HOBART"

THE PREMIER WAITS LOOKING SMUG. SECRETARY ENTERS.

SECRETARY The Prime Minister to see you, Premier.

PREMIER Better show her in then.

SECRETARY Yes, sir.

SHE GOES OUT. THE PREMIER PICKS UP THE PHONE AND PRETENDS TO BE IN CONVERSATION.

PREMIER Yes, use as much water as you want. Turn all the sprinklers on. Flood the place if you like, we've got plenty.

THE PRIME MINISTER ENTERS AND OVERHEARS THIS, AS INTENDED

P.M. (ENTERING) George.

PREMIER (HANGING UP) Shirley! Good to see you.

THEY SHAKE HANDS AND SIT

Now what can I do for you?

P.M. Water, George. We've got to talk about water.

PREMIER (INNOCENTLY) Water, Shirley?

P.M. You Tasmanians have still got lakes and rivers full of it -

PREMIER Yes, nature has rather blessed us that way.

P.M. Whereas we poor Mainlanders -

PREMIER Poor?

P.M. No rain for five years, George. That's poor.

PREMIER But, Shirley, you have got money.. whereas we poor Tasmanians...

P.M. What d'you mean?

PREMIER Over-taxed, under-employed -

P.M. Now, George -

PREMIER Almost all the bosses down here come from the Mainland. All the banks and big companies are owned by the Mainland -

P.M. Please, George, water!

PREMIER You want some water? Mary! (THE SECRETARY ENTERS) get the Prime Minister a glass of water, would you!

SECRETARY Yes, sir.

SHE GOES TO DO SO