

What's A Job?

Ken Phillips

WHO'D BE A COWBOY?

Imagine the scene. It's Melbourne's international tennis stadium on a mild autumn Saturday night. Red clay covers centre court. Ten thousand folk crowd the stands, most wearing tight jeans with big silver buckles, many with broad-brimmed cowboy hats. The rodeo has come to town!

Curious first-time-rodeo, city dwellers join the seasoned country folk who have come from across Australia for one of the largest crowd-pulling rodeos seen in Australia. Horses stream on to centre court racing at full gallop round the tight course, carrying the flags of the international competitors. It's a big, noisy event.

First off, it's the bucking horses. Crazy young men attempt to ride wild horses for more than eight seconds. A sheepskin-covered belt is pulled tight around the lower stomach of the specially bred horses to get them to buck. At eight seconds, maybe ten, the belt is released by the supervising horsemen controlling the event. The bucking immediately stops.

Next it's the women, who race at break-neck speed on superbly agile horses around three drums on centre court. Fifteen seconds and its over!

Finally, the madmen, who foolishly ignore the fact that sitting on a raging bull damages fatherhood potential. Few last more than four seconds before they hit the dirt. The quick release of the bulls' sheep-skinned belts stops the rampages. After eight rides, one fellow is receiving stitches to his forehead, another has recovered from unconsciousness. Later in the evening, one guy is unconscious before he hits the ground and is thrown by the bull like a rag-doll before the safety clowns can step in.

The score is up. Humans minus

ten! Animals plus ten! Now it's clear why so many of the older cowboys in the crowd limp or stoop!

After interval comes a change of pace. The 'horse whisperer' appears. He rides a pony bareback without reins.

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Another horse is by his side. He holds a small stick, with which he gives gentle pointers to the two ponies who follow his every suggestion. He speaks softly to the crowd and to his ponies through a microphone. The three move as one. He recites a poem while guiding his ponies. It's a story of bush culture, of a people who work, live and earn their livings with animals. To the city folk in the audience, it's a quaint but remote tale. To the country cousins, this is their life, their jobs, their pride.

The rodeo is not a country oddity. It's a crazy sport that emerged from the everyday work experiences of mustering, herding and dealing with cattle in a business that puts food on the tables of people world-wide. Country life is a living business and a culture.

But just before the next session of bucking horses begins, pandemonium erupts. Two protestors jump from their seats and land on centre court. They unfurl a banner. 'Blood sport'. Security men chase them. More protestors appear. The crowd boos! Several upset country folk jump down and punching begins. Two women cat-fight in the

dirt. Security personnel eventually restore order and the show continues.

The protest is a demonstration of the sustained demonization of country life and country business that emanates from the big cities. Farmers, so the new creed goes, suck our sacred rivers dry of water, tear down our magnificent forests, desecrate our environment with noxious weeds and kill Mother Earth with rising salt and persistent pesticides. Farmers are a menace!

So wake up cowboys and cow-girls! You're a bunch of mugs! For too long you've thought that reason and sense would prevail. Just because you add trillions of dollars to the Australian economy you think that the pollies and city folk will understand. But don't you know that milk doesn't come from cows? It comes from cartons in supermarkets!

And wake up you must. Your jobs are on the line. Only you can help yourselves. The anti-farmer ideology is the meanest raging bull you could ever ride. And it's a long ride. It's time you stopped pretending you can live with this new ideology. It wants to take you out!

You have no choice. Become focused or disappear. Plan. Be strategic, patient and determined. Create allies and be smarter than your foes. Your foes are often within! Identify your business objectives. Take no bull!

The International Australian Rodeo was held at Melbourne's Rod Laver Arena on Saturday 16 April 2005. None of the protestors was charged with breaching work safety or other laws. Ken Phillips is Director of the IPA's Workplace Reform Unit.

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