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AMONGST EQUALS

(AUSTRALIAN-DOCU)

A Jotz Prods.-Film Australia production. Executive producer, Paul Humphress. Written and directed by Tom Zubrycki. Camera (color), Joel Peterson; editor, Zubrycki; music, Paul Chartier; sound, Russ Hermann; production manager, Marie Delofski; narration, Graham Pitts. Reviewed at Mosman screening room, Sydney, July 20, 1991. Running time: 93 MIN.

Talented Aussie docu filmmaker Tom Zubrycki ran into well-publicized trouble over his production of "Amongst Equals," a fascinating record of the Australian union movement. If he is ever able to finish the film, it should be sought-after fare at international film fests and could recoup some of the Aussie taxpayers' investment via tv and video sales.

Pic, funded by federal money and effectively banned by Australia's Council of Trade Unions, screened illegally at the recent Melbourne Film Festival and at Sydney's AFI cinema. Actually, nothing in the docu is very provocative at all.

The ban seems extraordinary because Zubrycki's film is clearly what it was originally supposed to be: a historical appraisal of the turbulent role of trade unions in Australian life. In 1987, Zubrycki proposed the film for the country's 1988 Bi-Centenary, and received the support of the country's official docu film unit, Film Australia, as well as the Australian Bicentennial Authority.

The ABA, a federal unit, gave \$A200,000 to the ACTU to make the film, and the council then contracted Film Australia to produce "Amongst Equals" with Zubrycki as writer-director. The contract specified that the film would be "a critical appraisal" of the trade union movement.

When the film was nearing completion in 1988, however, ACTU leadership clearly was critical of this "critical appraisal," and particularly objected to ar-

chive footage of historically well-documented union struggles. After months of discussion and five recuts, the ACTU slapped a ban on the film. Zubrycki, referring to the ABA coin, has accused the ACTU of misusing public money.

Docu covers the mass strikes during World War I, the battle for an eight-hour work day, ACTU formation in 1927 and the unions' first foray into foreign policy when they tried to prevent shipment of pig-iron to Japan in 1939. Zubrycki also explores the aftermath of World War II, with the election of a Labor government which sent the army in to break a crippling coal strike.

The filmmaker also explores union battles fought by women, migrants and aboriginal workers, especially the equal-pay-for-women campaigns. The so-called "green bans," invoked in the '70s by building unions to prevent demolition of historically important inner-city buildings, also are covered.

In addition to powerful archive footage, Zubrycki uses veterans of these old struggles to reminisce. The result is a vivid and impressive historical survey, and if the film seems sketchy on contemporary events, it's perhaps because the ACTU forced the helmer to remove (in an early cut) footage criticizing analysis of the current wages accord between government and unions.

—David Stratton