

# NO MILK NO HONEY

## STUDY NOTES prepared by Franco di Chiera

**SUBJECTS:** SOSE, History, Studies of Society and the Environment and Australian Studies and in particular, themes and concepts including immigration, economics, agriculture and conservation.

**LEVELS:** Upper Secondary (Years 10-12)

### Synopsis

At the end of the First World War, many British ex-servicemen joined the queues of the unemployed. When films and glossy brochures appeared promising "a new life, a new start on your own dairy farm in the paradise of Western Australia", unsuspecting British families travelled to the other side of the world under a hastily-conceived immigration program known as the Group Settlement Scheme. But instead of the promised "paradise", Group Settlers were greeted by an unforgiving, alien landscape and a harsh, regimented lifestyle. Those who stayed were determined to survive, despite the hardships. They gradually cleared the bush and turned it into pasture, developing the south-west into the "land of milk and honey" it is today.

Film Australia's *No Milk No Honey* is an insightful and challenging look at the lives of some of Australia's last true pioneers, provoking discussion about the human and environmental cost of development versus economic benefits.

**Executive Producer:** Sharon Connolly

**Producer:** Andrew Ogilvie

**Writer/Director:** Franco di Chiera

**Duration:** 54 minutes

**Year of Production:** 1997

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## Background

Western Australia was settled as a British colony in 1829. However, good agricultural land was scarce and early migrants often left as soon as they came. At a time when other colonies around Australia were shaking off the stigma of convict labour, Western Australia found itself reliant on convicts as a source of population growth and cheap labour. The discovery of gold in the 1890s was a saving grace for the colony, helping it to survive into the twentieth century.

In the period immediately following World War I, Western Australia was still importing much of its milk from the eastern states, some three thousand kilometres away. Yet W.A. had vast underdeveloped areas in the South West which, given the good rainfall, appeared ideal for farming. The main problem however, was a lack of population to clear the land.

The post-war world was a time of expansion and optimism. Group Settlement in Western Australia reflected an international mood. Within Australia itself, the scheme looked as if it could set an example to the rest of the country. As things turned out, it was more of a precedent - for bad management, or so the critics claimed. While other Australian land schemes of the time, such as Soldier Settlement in Victoria, attracted their fair share of complaints, it was W.A.'s Group Settlement Scheme which drew harshest criticism of all. For some, however it both failed and succeeded in the extreme.

*No Milk No Honey* is a cautionary tale about the effects of Group Settlement in the development of Western Australia's economy and infrastructure. It focuses on the example of a Scheme instigated by the Western Australian and British governments in the early 1920s, the legacy of which is startlingly apparent today.

The South West is now one of the fastest developing regions in Australia today, boosting a multi million dollar dairy industry, a diverse economy and a growing population. This has also been accompanied by the demise of the South West's unique Karri and Jarrah forests.

## Before Watching

Think and talk about some of the following issues and questions:

### TITLE

What might be the significance of the title *No Milk No Honey*?

### POEM

The following verse was written by Group Settler Archy Jackson.

Way back in the early twenties,  
we sailed from a distant shore,  
To the promise of a better life  
than which had gone before.  
To the land of milk and honey -  
well, at least that's what they said;  
What they didn't way was  
we'd have to live in a draughty old tin shed!

Extract the information about Group Settlement from the poem:

- Period
- Mode of transport
- Reason Group Settlers left Britain
- Sales pitch given to prospective migrants
- Reality

Discuss the following:

### **ROLE OF GOVERNMENT**

- What were some of the reasons why the West Australian Government was keen to attract immigrants to the South West region of the State in the 1920s.
- Describe the circumstances which lead the British government to become involved in the Scheme.
- Why was there a focus on British immigrants? What was Australia's relationship with Britain at the time?

### **THE MIGRANT DREAM**

- Describe likely profiles of British migrants coming to Australian in the 1920s. That is, what were some of the backgrounds which typified Group Settlers at that time?
- Why did they want to migrate to rural Australia?
- What type of images of Australia were prospective immigrants shown and what were they told?
- What was the reality once they arrived to the South West? Describe what the living conditions were like.
- List some key words which describe how Group Settlers might have felt once they saw the conditions.
- What was the final blow which forced many Settlers to walk off the land?
- What were the positive aspects of Group Settlement which enabled them to survive?
- What makes a migrant determined to succeed despite the obstacles? Do all immigrants succeed? Who benefits overall?
- Describe the South West of today. How closely does it resemble the original dream?

## **COST AND BENEFITS**

- What was the financial cost of the Scheme to the British Government?
- What did it cost Settlers financially?
- What was the human cost involved?
- What was the environmental cost?
- What are the economic and cultural benefits?

## **MEASURING SUCCESS**

- The Group Settlement Scheme planned to transport some 80,000 British immigrants to Canada, New Zealand and Australia. How many eventually went to the South West? What percentage stayed on the land?
- How can success be measured for the Scheme? List various values or criteria? On which do you place highest importance?
- What were the government's values or priorities at the time? How do these compare with the earlier list?
- What mistakes were made by governments, banks and Settlers themselves?
- What are the lessons which can be learnt from the experience of Group Settlement? What are the implications for better government?

## **Questions**

The following quote was used at the beginning of the film.

*"I plead guilty to having dreamed of greatness for Western Australia".* - James Mitchell, Premier of Western Australia, 1919-24 and 1930-33

- What do you think was the film maker's intention behind using such a quote? What do the words "guilty" and "greatness" suggest in relation to Group Settlement?
- Do you think the point of view implied is a fair summation of the Group Settlement Scheme?

## **About the Author**

Franco di Chiera, film director, is a graduate of the Australian Film Television and Radio School (majoring in Direction and Production Management) and Murdoch University (majoring in Communications Studies). The majority of his projects have screened on SBS-TV and ABC-TV and include other Film Australia releases. *The Artist*, *The Peasant* was an award winner at the Houston International Film Festival and *Under the Skin*, which he produced, was nominated for five AFI Awards (winning Best Mini Series/Telefeature), two AWGIEs and an ATOM Award.

Franco was also the SBS Executive on Rolf de Heer's feature film *The Quiet Room* (screened in Official Competition at the Cannes International Film Festival) and the package of indigenous dramas *From Sand to Celluloid* (screened at the Venice International Film Festival).

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