

## Australia Dossier by Kelvin Heslop

### Government pays farmers to get out

*Free-market bluebloods and the greens are plotting the extinction of an endangered species—the family farmer.*

**P**rime Minister John Howard has just announced the Rural Adjustment Scheme (RAS), a new initiative to “rescue” Australia’s rural industry. Under the RAS, as of Dec. 1, the government will pay food producers to *leave their land*. Howard conjured up images of euthanasia, in claiming that the RAS allows farmers to “depart with dignity.”

The RAS is another nail in the coffin of Australia’s drought-ravaged farmers, and will allow the bigger property holders, especially the food cartels, to buy up intensively improved agricultural properties for a song. Yet, most shocking, the policy was developed by the major rural lobby, the National Farmers Federation (NFF), in conjunction with the farmers’ enemies, the green movement.

Australian agriculture was booming in the mid-1960s: Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that there were then 252,162 farmers; today, there are 115,368, and almost two-thirds of them are barely viable, due to drought and cartel-rigged low prices, even though farm productivity increased 60% during 1977-93.

Leading the charge for the RAS is Primary Industries Minister John Anderson, the deputy leader of the National Party, which used to be called the Country Party, and which supposedly represents the rural population. Anderson, and party leader and Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, have been ramming free trade down farmers’ throats—a far cry from legendary National Party leaders like “Black” Jack McEwen and Doug Anthony, who, particularly the former, fought

bitterly with the aristocratic landholders who dominate Australian rural politics and who fanatically propound British free trade. Anderson is a private school-educated “blueblood” who thinks Australia should be deindustrialized. He told the Jan. 11-12 *Weekend Australian*, “Australia should focus more on improving its exports of raw materials rather than developing processing industries.”

To oversee the implementation of the RAS, Anderson has appointed a collection of bankers, greenies, bureaucrats, and a vice president of the NFF, also dominated by pro-free-trade bluebloods. The council is chaired by Neil Inall, chairman of Greening Australia Ltd., set up to plant a billion trees by the year 2000. The RAS Council’s guidelines are to ensure that the only farmers left growing food, are ones “able to operate competitively in a deregulated financial and market environment.” This will allegedly “improve the competitiveness of the farm sector in an [environmentally] sustainable manner.” The RAS provides various “incentives to leave farming,” including a reestablishment grant of up to AUS \$45,000 (if farmers have no more than AUS \$90,000 in assets).

Maurice Hetherington, a cattle and wheat grower in central Queensland, and the chairman of the Citizens Electoral Council, the co-thinkers of Lyndon LaRouche in Australia and a national political party with a strong rural base, sees this as a bad joke. Even if the farmer wanted to sell his property, “there are just no buyers,” he said. “I went to a farm auction just last week, and it was just like what was happen-

ing in the rural sector in the United States during the 1980s. A lot of people were there, but no one was buying anything, especially the big machinery.”

Anderson and the NFF are also attacking farmers through environmentalism and indigenism. NFF Executive Director Wendy Craik is the former head of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, a World Heritage conservation area, and the NFF has joined with the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) in the Landcare program, a huge operation to turn farmers into greenies, including convincing them to agree to the banning of chemicals and fertilizers. The ACF, founded by Prince Philip, is the mother of all environmentalist and indigenous operations downunder.

Another joint ACF-NFF operation is the Natural Heritage Trust, a billion-dollar environmentalist fund to be financed by the privatization of Telstra, Australia’s national telecommunications carrier.

With Australia, traditionally one of the world’s major food exporters, placing so much emphasis on tree planting and other greenie initiatives, while pushing farmers off the land, one might wonder what the prospects for future food production are. According to John Anderson, we should return to an “indigenist” mode of hunting and gathering. On World Food Day, Oct. 16, Anderson said that the answer to global food security could well be “cooperation among indigenous communities in harsh environments.” To this end, his department, and the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organization, have announced they are “collaborating to fund two Aboriginal women from central Australia to visit an indigenous community in Niger, West Africa, to exchange information on the use of acacia seeds as a food source.”