

Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas and Robert Barwick

War on the docks

The Mont Pelerin Society is using the National Farmers Federation to smash the Maritime Union.

A state of industrial-relations war was declared in Australia in late January, when the National Farmers Federation (NFF), the country's leading farm organization, initiated moves to establish a non-unionized stevedoring operation on the Melbourne docks. Australia's ports are 100% unionized by the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA); the purpose of the new, non-unionized firm, is to crush the MUA.

The NFF move is the latest in a series of ruthless attacks against Australia's trade unions coordinated by the London-based Mont Pelerin Society, the chief economic warfare unit of the British Crown; the Mont Pelerin-dominated Australian Federal government; and Rio Tinto, the world's largest mining company, in which the Queen has huge holdings. The new NFF company has deep pockets: The NFF itself has a \$20 million "Fighting Fund" dedicated to crushing unions, the Federal government has pledged \$100 million for "redundancy payments" to push unionized workers off the docks, and unnamed Australian corporations have pledged an additional \$100 million to back it.

The NFF initiative comes one month after the exposure of a plan by former Australian Special Air Services (SAS) personnel to secretly train and equip a non-union workforce in the port of Dubai, to be brought back into Australia. That scheme was foiled, but the NFF operation is a continuation of it, as indicated by the following: Like the SAS caper, it has full Federal government backing; the NFF plans to hire personnel from that exercise, and riot shields sent to the private security firm guarding the NFF's new dock were hired by a company run by one of the

Dubai commandos; and, Chris Corrigan, the CEO of Patrick Stevedores, which rented the dock space to the NFF, admitted, after previously denying it, that he had provided extensive backing to the SAS operation, and had leased to the NFF the same dock earlier pledged to the SAS crew.

The Australian press has portrayed the affair as one of "farmers," anxious to save on the shipping costs of their primary products, taking on the featherbedding union bosses. But the only relation of the NFF to farmers, is that it is attempting to crush them, through its policies of free trade and financial deregulation.

The NFF was set up in 1978 by a bunch of fanatically pro-free-trade blue-blood "squatters"—the Australian landed oligarchy with historically intimate ties to London. Typical is NFF founder and former president Ian McLachlan, whose family owns one of the largest rural properties in Australia. Now Defense Minister, McLachlan provided active-duty Australian troops (who were "on leave") for the Dubai training. Also indicative, are two of the board members of the "Fighting Fund": Nobby Clark, the chairman or former chairman of several major Australian corporations, including the National Australia Bank; and Charles Copeman, a former official with Rio Tinto's Australian subsidiary CRA (now merged back into Rio Tinto), who led a spectacular union-busting exercise at Robe River in Western Australia in the 1980s.

While the NFF takes the spotlight, behind this campaign stands the H.R. Nicholls Society, an Australian subsidiary of the Mont Pelerin Society. Almost all of the top leaders of the

NFF are members of H.R. Nicholls, while many officials of Prime Minister John Howard's government are H.R. Nicholls members or associates as well, including Howard, McLachlan, Industrial Relations Minister Peter Reith, Treasurer Peter Costello, Assistant Treasurer Rod Kemp, and Education Minister Dr. David Kemp.

H.R. Nicholls was founded in 1986. The keynote speaker at its founding meeting was Hugh Morgan, the chief executive of WMC Ltd., one of the world's largest mining companies; WMC executive officer Ray Evans, one of only 13 Australian members of the Mont Pelerin Society, is a member of H.R. Nicholls' four-person ruling board. WMC Ltd. (formerly known as Western Mining Co.) has a long Anglo-philic history: It was founded by Anglo-Australian financier William Sydney Robinson, an agent for Sir Claude Majoribanks Dansey, a deputy chief of Britain's MI6 intelligence agency in the 1930s and 1940s. Robinson simultaneously founded the Consolidated Zinc Co., which merged with Rio Tinto to become Consolidated Zinc Rio Tinto Australia (CRA), Rio Tinto's Australian arm.

As the war on the docks heats up, Australia's unions received another blow on Jan. 29, when the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC), which for the last eight decades has been an arbitrator for disputes between labor and management, ruled, in effect, that it would no longer play that role, opening the unions up to corporate lockouts and other attacks. That ruling followed the Howard government's "Workplace Relations Act" of December 1997, which proposes "individual contracts" to replace unions. The two have a common mother: the Queen's Rio Tinto. Rio Tinto executive Mike Angwin helped draft the WRA, while the chief justice of the IRC, Geoffrey Giudice, is a former Rio Tinto lawyer.