

## Australia Dossier by Robert Barwick

### Thumbs Down To Humanity

*The federal election was decided by a vox populi mob, but LaRouche's associates tripled their vote.*

The scene is a coliseum. The bleachers are overflowing with frenzied spectators, who are absorbed in the ongoing struggle in the arena below. The arena is flooded, and an overloaded, barely seaworthy boat is on the verge of sinking, as desperate men, women, and children cry for help. A toga-clad Prime Minister John Howard, flanked by a similarly clad, corpulent opposition leader Kim Beazley, extend their arms—thumbs down to the mostly Iraqi and Afghani refugees! The crowd roars its approval.

Thus ended a five-week federal election campaign in Australia on Nov. 10, with Liberal Party leader John Howard being re-elected for a third term. Howard had achieved an amazing electoral turnaround: Six months earlier, in his own words, his government was “gone for all money.” His Liberal Party/National Party Coalition had lost power in the states of Queensland and Western Australia, and was even losing elections to the Opposition Australian Labor Party (ALP) in strong Liberal Party areas.

Howard turned it all around with a blatant appeal to popular opinion, the *vox populi*, on the issue of “boat people”—desperate refugees trying to illegally land in Australia.

Without warning, in late August, the Howard Government ordered that a Norwegian vessel, the MV Tampa—which had been asked by *Australian authorities* to rescue a capsized boatload of refugees near Christmas Island—be stopped from offloading the refugees onto Australian territory. The message from Australia was “they are not our problem,” and a stand-off ensued, involving the Norwegian gov-

ernment, which wasn't solved until New Zealand stepped in, along with the tiny, impoverished Pacific island nation of Nauru, to take the refugees themselves. Howard's political line was, “We decide who comes to Australia,” and he turned it into an issue of national sovereignty.

Opinion polls recorded 80% support for his stance, from an increasingly unemployed, worried electorate. Cowed by these polls, the ALP Opposition fell into line with Howard's stance, and gave their support for draconian new “border protection” laws to enforce it. The terrorist crisis on Sep. 11 boosted Howard still further, by casting further suspicion on the mostly Iraqi and Afghani boat people.

Under the new laws, all subsequent boatloads of refugees were intercepted by the Australian Navy, and offloaded on to Nauru, which has a population density of 590 persons per square kilometer—compared to 2 for Australia!

This set the stage for the entire election campaign, and Howard shamelessly played it up, most notoriously when he lied that refugees on one boat threw their children into the water in order to force the Navy to pick them up. Snarled Howard, “We don't want those kind of people in Australia.” This lie was later proven to be such, but that had no political impact, and Howard was re-elected. Reflecting the international scorn for Australia's inhumane position, he immediately tried to distance himself from his election tactics, while the ALP claimed that they had to support Howard, or face electoral doom themselves.

The bright spot in the election, which was otherwise a mandate to continue with both major parties' savage commitment to globalization, was the results for Lyndon LaRouche's Australian associates, the Citizens Electoral Council. Campaigning under the slogan “Let's build out of the depression! Support LaRouche's New Bretton Woods,” the CEC tripled its nation-wide vote over the 1998 election, winning over 23,000 votes for 49 candidates, according to near-final tallies. In many electoral districts, CEC candidates attracted 1-2% of the total, and in two districts got 2.4% and 3.2% respectively. These are significant vote totals under Australia's complex “preferential” voting system, where the votes of the minor-placing candidates are numbered in descending order of preference and then divided between the two leading candidates according to that numbering; the CEC's vote enabled it to determine the outcome of some close contests through its “preferences.”

The only other party to significantly increase its vote was the Greens (to over 4%), in large part for its principled opposition to the government's handling of the boat people issue, and with the help of a lot of media coverage not bestowed on the CEC. The pathetic ALP attracted its lowest vote since the 1930s, and the vote for the populist Pauline Hanson's One Nation party, which has redefined Australian politics since it emerged in 1996, collapsed in half, down from 9%. One Nation was stymied by Howard's campaigning on an anti-immigration platform, which was unfortunately one of the issues popularized by Hanson. She has more useful issues, such as opposition to globalization, but this was the one which the media promoted most. Hanson said of Howard's anti-immigration stance: “I feel like I'm his adviser.”