

Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas

Drought Ravages a Continent

Lyndon LaRouche's associates have made great water projects the talk of the nation.

Australia is in the tight grip of what is probably its worst drought since European colonization in 1788. Rainfall levels and water storage are at historic lows, and the value of farm produce is expected to drop from \$9.9 billion this year to \$3.7 billion or even lower, in this, one of the largest agricultural exporting countries of the world. The price of water has skyrocketed, from \$25-50 per megaliter (half the volume of an Olympic swimming pool) to as much as \$1,800; the Southern Hemisphere is just entering Summer, so the situation is expected to get much worse before it gets better. As *The Australian* newspaper summarized the case on Oct. 3, "The present drought is bringing ruination to many farmers, and the human cost is as devastating as the monumental stock [animal] losses."

In this horrific crisis, the notion of "great water projects" and "drought-proofing" the continent, is being widely discussed, in the federal Cabinet, in major talk radio shows, in the print media, and among the business elite. Others have helped popularize these notions, notably billionaire businessman Richard Pratt and the visionary engineer and veteran of the huge, post-war Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, Prof. Lance Endersbee; but the key impetus for the "great projects" discussion now taking place, has been the work of Lyndon LaRouche's associates in the Citizens Electoral Council (CEC).

Back in February, when the water problems were serious, but not yet catastrophic, the CEC issued a detailed proposal for 18 major water projects, which comprised the most compre-

hensive water development proposal in the nation's history. Inspired by LaRouche, and based in part upon Professor Endersbee's detailed studies, the proposal was released in the CEC's *New Citizen* newspaper as part of a special report, "The Infrastructure Road to Recovery—Let's Build Our Way Out of the Depression!" It featured a large map, and documentation which showed how numerous of the nation's rivers, particularly in its underdeveloped North, which now flow unused into the sea, could be turned inland to "make the deserts bloom." The report was sent to 12,000 individuals and institutions in the 20 million-person country, comprising virtually every key figure in political, engineering, religious, social welfare, farm lobby, and other leading institutions.

The CEC's mass organizing around these proposals has contributed to a seeming factional affray in the establishment, with one grouping, centered around Visy Industries Chairman Richard Pratt, championing a \$10 billion plan to line most of the nation's open irrigation channels with pipe, saving up to 80% of water now lost to evaporation. Pratt and his allies, including multibillionaire Kerry Packer, News Ltd. (Murdoch) CEO John Hartigan, and Telstra (national phone company) Chairman Bob Mansfield, have established the Farmhand Foundation, for short-term aid to farmers, and to discuss a long-term "great projects" approach to Australia's perennial drought problems, including turning rivers inland.

On the other side of the street is a collection of so-called "scientists"

who have fanatically denounced any notion of "great projects," and who are crusading for astronomical water price hikes, and *no* water development. Known as the Wentworth group, they were organized by British Royal Consort Prince Philip's World Wide Fund for Nature, which sponsored their inaugural meeting. This motley collection of hacks and quacks, whose eyeball-bulging anti-science ravings would make even the most hardened Luddite blush, is led by environmentalist Dr. Tim Flannery. Flannery has long crusaded to reduce Australia's population to only 6 million, and his Wentworth gang's highly publicized "scientific advice," is that man "just has to live with" Australia's harsh climate and poor soils, and give up any notion of conquering those challenges. The group's name is fitting: William Wentworth was a 19th-Century political stooge for the Crown and its ultra-wealthy "squatters."

Anti-development insanity is not confined to Flannery's flakes, however. Federal and state ministers will meet in November to discuss reducing irrigation flows in Australia's most populated and developed river basin, the Murray-Darling system (comprising 40% of the nation's agricultural output), by 5-15%, in order to "restore the natural flow" of the Snowy River. The Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme, which was built from 1947 to 1974 in order to feed that system, has been cited by the American Institute of Engineers as "one of the seven engineering wonders of the world." Even so, Australian officialdom now plans to dismantle it as quickly as they can—and in the midst of the nation's worst-ever drought!

Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad. LaRouche's CEC may make enough Australians sane, to save them from such madness.