

LaRouche Factor Grows In Australian Politics

by Allen Douglas

As the world economy sinks into depression, 2004 U.S. Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche's influence is growing worldwide; Australia is no exception. There are two, most recent markers of this rising influence downunder, linked to the activity of LaRouche's co-thinkers in the Citizens Electoral Council (CEC), a national political party. The CEC has led a successful fight against the Liberal/National Party government's attempts to pass draconian, police-state laws. And now the CEC has generated wide support for its campaign for a national bank, and for great infrastructure projects modelled on the legendary Snowy Mountains hydroelectric scheme, which the American Society of Engineers called "one of the seven engineering wonders of the world."

On Aug. 27, the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the main opposition party to the ruling coalition, announced that it would reject the government's "ASIO bill" in the Senate. This is the final piece in the "anti-terrorism" package that had been passed by the House in late March, and then by the Senate (in an altered form, and minus the ASIO bill) in late June. The thus-doomed ASIO bill would have turned the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) into a Gestapo or KGB, with the right to detain anyone indefinitely—even if they were suspected of only having "information" about terrorism—with no lawyer, no right to remain silent, and the threat of a five-year jail sentence for "non-cooperation." The ALP had voted for the rest of the government's "anti-terror" package in the Senate in late June. So why their sudden, staunch opposition to the ASIO bill?

Shortly after the House passed the "anti-terror" package—the most far-reaching changes to the nation's legal system since World War II—LaRouche's CEC began an intensive nationwide mobilization against it, notwithstanding an apparently unstoppable government/ALP alliance to push the bills through the Senate as well. The CEC issued 500,000 leaflets denouncing the bills as "identical to Hitler's *Notverordnung*." (This was the Feb. 28, 1934 "emergency decree" the day after the Reichstag fire, which laid the juridical basis for the Nazi seizure of power.) The CEC also organized a phone call and e-mail campaign which hammered Liberal/National and ALP senators with 200 calls or e-mails per day; and sponsored a full-page ad in the country's major daily, *The Australian*, signed by 220 elected officials and other prominent Australians, which denounced the bills as, "in the most literal sense of the term, *fascist*."



CEC organizer Ross Russell (left) and local Queensland members of the expanding movement, organizing in the drought-hit town of Dalby, Queensland. Drought has hit 80% of the state; the CEC is mobilizing for new projects of water infrastructure which have long been left undone.

Although the bills could have easily been defeated then, had the nominally pro-civil rights ALP voted against them, the ALP was forced at least to demand that they be watered down significantly before the Senate passed them in late June. The Attorney General's power unilaterally to ban organizations was dropped. It later emerged, that the government *had already drawn up a list of organizations to be banned*. With the ASIO bill put off until August, a continued CEC mobilization sparked sufficient resistance to make the ALP withdraw its earlier, implicit support, and demand that the bill be consigned to committee in the Senate, a review which will likely drag on for months. Observers say that the bill, in its present form, is dead.

Fight for a National Bank

In February 2002, one month before the government rammed its "anti-terror" laws through the House, the CEC issued a special report, "The Infrastructure Road to Recovery," in its *New Citizen* newspaper, with the headline, "Facing the Depression: A Fascist Police State, or Economic Development?" The report outlined an inspiring vision for the dry, largely unpopulated continent. First, it proposed a population of 50 million by the year 2050, harking back to the "Populate or Perish!" slogan of the optimistic, post-war years, when Australia welcomed millions of immigrants from war-torn Europe to its shores—the labor force that largely built the monumental Snowy Mountains hydroelectric scheme.

The report's centerpiece was a proposed series of new, Snowy-style projects to harness a number of Australia's mighty rivers on the northern and eastern coasts, which now flow unutilized to the sea. Such great water projects could

almost make the continent drought-proof, and provide jobs for Australia's unemployed. The nation already had significant water problems when the report was published; since then, it has suffered one of the worst droughts of the past 50 years, with at least one state, Queensland, 80% covered by drought. The report has met intense interest around the country.

The *New Citizen* also proposed to construct a network of maglev trains linking the major cities; in particular, Melbourne in the Southeast to the port of Darwin on the northern coast, the gateway to the huge population centers of Asia via high-speed shipping, in which Australia has been a world leader. Other elements included the construction of a new nuclear industry featuring ultra-safe high-temperature gas-cooled reactors, a revitalized space program, and a dramatic upgrading of the country's collapsing health and education systems.

Immediately after its late-June success in watering down the government's first package of fascist "anti-terror" laws, the CEC relaunched its infrastructure campaign around the re-establishment of a national bank. The party issued 500,000 leaflets (1 for every 38 Australians) under the title, "A National Bank, for National Sovereignty!" citing LaRouche's forecasts and calls for a New Bretton Woods conference and national banking.

Australia once had a national bank, the Commonwealth Bank, established in 1911 by American immigrant King O'Malley, a federal MP who called himself "the Alexander Hamilton of Australia"; but that was privatized in 1995 by ALP Prime Minister Paul Keating. The CEC intends to get 1 million signatures for the bank, and has already secured the

signatures of 700 elected officials and other prominent figures, from all sides of Australian politics.

Australia's Political Parties: A Potemkin Village

The clout which LaRouche's associates are now wielding in Australian politics is seemingly paradoxical, given that the CEC is invariably blacked out of the major press, and that its electoral vote totals have been rather modest, reaching a high of 8% for one CEC candidate in the West Australian state elections of 2001. But LaRouche's ideas spread in the global crisis, where the reality of Australian politics is far different than the media portrays.

First, the "major" parties, the Liberal/National party coalition and the ALP, are widely despised for fanatically pushing privatization, deregulation, and free trade, which have savaged Australia's once-vibrant economy. The collapse in these parties is seen in: 1) their falling vote totals, and 2) their plummeting national membership. For decades, the two major parties split almost the entire popular vote between them, with a small slice going to the Democrats, founded as a third-party alternative 25 years ago and turned into a "balance of power" in the Senate for many years. But, in the federal election in October 2001, almost 20% of the population voted for someone outside the major parties. Only 5.4% of that went to the Democrats, some to the Greens, and a slice to another third-party effort, Pauline Hanson's One Nation party, which had borrowed some policies from the CEC, and which had been pumped up by the major media beginning 1996 in an effort to derail LaRouche's soaring influence in rural Australia. One Nation is also now disappearing, leaving the Greens—a spin-off of the Prince Philip-founded Australian Conservation Foundation—as the third-party safety valve for popular anger.

But the parties' respective membership figures are a far more accurate gauge of their genuine popular support, than media-manipulated voting patterns. This is where the reality of what the CEC represents, shines through. When Liberal Prime Minister John Howard won the federal election in 1996, his Liberals had 64,000 paid members, and the ALP had 57,000—leaving aside the Liberals' junior partners, the National Party, which is widely admitted to be heading for oblivion. Those memberships have collapsed dramatically, as the parties have continued to push globalization. Some figures have leaked out over the past months in the media, along with statements by various party members themselves, which document that collapse throughout Australia's six states and two territories.

The Liberal Party's New South Wales branch, its largest, has only 6,000 members, according to political writer Paul Sheehan of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and two-thirds of them are age 65 or older; while its Western Australian (W.A.) branch has 800 and its Tasmanian branch has only 600. With the other states/territories, the Liberals have a national mem-



Australia's World War I-era leader King O'Malley established its national bank, the Commonwealth Bank. LaRouche's CEC, 2000 members strong, is generating wide support in the country for its demand to revive the national bank, and take the "infrastructure path to recovery."

bership of perhaps 15-20,000, at best. And many of these are bogus, according to W.A. Liberal MP Don Randall, who recently said that 90% of Liberal dues-paying members are "phantom members." "As far as phantom members are concerned, 90% of people who become members don't play an active role," he told the Aug. 4 *Sunday Times*. "And many don't even remember they are members—it doesn't stick in their minds."

Taking Randall's 90% phantom members estimate, one counts, at most, 2,000 active members of the ruling party of Australia! Even if this underestimates slightly, it is a far, far cry from the popular perception. The ALP is not much better, since, as is frequently reported even in the major media, much of its membership is the result of "branch stacking," where a local ALP honcho will pay for the phantom "memberships" of local party branches, many of whom come from local non-English-speaking ethnic communities.

As former ALP Sen. Chris Schacht recently told the "Lateline" TV show, "You've probably got less than 10,000 genuinely active members" in the Labor Party. It may be significantly less: The ALP could not even mobilize enough local members to man the polling booths in the Melbourne district of its national leader, Simon Crean, at the last election.

As for the more prominent "third party" efforts, the Democrats had 2,500 members at the time of their last leadership vote over a year ago, and the Greens, who have no national office nor any significant organizational structure, have perhaps a few more than that.

The LaRouche-affiliated CEC, by contrast, has a highly active membership of 2,000 (which is growing rapidly, toward a target of 5,000), with a full-time headquarters in Melbourne at least as large as the national headquarters of the Liberals or the ALP. LaRouche's influence, already evident in the campaign against the "anti-terror" laws, and for the national bank, will rapidly intensify as the depression deepens.