

'Australia's future: stand with the South'

by Lydia Cherry

Many Australians are fiercely opposed to their prime minister, Bob Hawke's, exceeding subservience to the dictates of the Anglo-American oligarchical elite. The country, in spite of some of its leadership, has had good ties with developing countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Two Australians who talked to *EIR*, Member of Parliament George Crawford, and a leader of the Australian People's Conference, Robert Pash, are committed to stopping the insanity of the Gulf war and getting Australia back into the business of fostering economic growth.

"The blockade of Iraq devastated Australia's wheat, wool, and live sheep markets in the Middle East," Pash explained, noting that Iraq was Australia's largest trading partner in the region. He said that, over a 30-year period, Australia had spent massive resources in developing this market, "only to have it destroyed overnight."

Crawford, who has been a member of the Australian Labor Party for 46 years, and has served three terms as president of the party in the state of Victoria, has also been a leader in the trade union movement. While emphasizing the need to build industry, he also expressed concern about how George Bush's war was affecting Australian farmers. "We had a wheat shipment on its way to Iraq when the sanctions were imposed. There are tremendous apprehensions here about whether Australia will ever get that market back—in terms of sheep, sows and wheat."

Crawford noted that it has been reported in the Australia media that the United States "is giving cheap wheat to a number of these Middle Eastern countries as part of the sop for being in the allied forces. This has caused an immensely adverse reaction. Here, we are backing the United States, and they are giving wheat away, while we are battling to sell our wheat."

Crawford talked about a group that was formed by state Labor MPs in mid-January, "Labor for Peace in the Middle East," for which he is spokesman. "It is a growing movement . . . even though certainly it would be a small minority of Members of Parliament" who are part of the group. He said it was important for Americans to know that "a lot of Australians see the United States as being the most aggressive country in the world—in its actions of aggression against other countries." It's not just a question of Iraq, he continued, "There's a whole list of countries—Panama, Grenada, Libya."

Over 10 years ago, before the U.S. began dropping bombs on Libya, Crawford noted that "a number of state governments in Australia entered into a joint scheme with Libya in terms of farming in Arab lands. Libya had come to Australia seeking some assistance because Australia has arid areas of farmland and so on. So a program was jointly developed. . . . Libyans were brought here, and they went through courses in an agricultural college; they studied farming here." He noted that this ended, and that "any further development along these lines has been frustrated and prevented because Australia—Prime Minister Hawke—closed down the Libyan embassy." The explanation given for the closure, Crawford said, was "some spurious thing about what they were doing somewhere in the Pacific . . . but we believe he did it at the behest of the United States."

Asked if Hawke's notorious pro-Israel feelings, and in particular his extremely close ties to Sir Peter Abeles, the owner of TNT, one of the world's largest transport companies and one of Israel's biggest backers in Australia, might have influenced Hawke's actions on the Gulf war, Crawford replied, "Yes I believe that it did. There is no question about the fact that Hawke is pro-Israel, very much so, and consequently anti-Arab to a certain extent. There's been a lot of difficulty in getting an even-handed approach past him [in Parliament] on Middle East questions." Hawke's honorary Israeli citizenship caused a flap in Australia in 1988, since the Australian Constitution forbids dual citizenship.

Trip to Baghdad

Pash talked about his visit to Iraq in late December as part of a fact-finding delegation from the Australian People's Conference, and noted that, as part of his organizing efforts now to end the war he was showing a slide show of that trip.

"What we saw in Iraq—your [*EIR*] material comments on this, and I was really pleased to see that—the amount of development going on around Baghdad is amazing. The infrastructure that they have put in, the railways system, these are impressive things. This is the most advanced area of the Arab nation. Libya has made a big success of different technological areas, but nothing like this. I thought as I looked at this: This is the reason why they had to destroy Iraq. They don't want the infrastructure that's going into countries like Iraq to proceed, when every place else is undergoing deindustrialization. You should see this place," referring to Australia. And "what is amazing about Iraq," he continued, "is that they did it, they put this all together during the same time they were fighting a war with Iran. This is bound to send chills down [the Anglo-Americans'] spines. This is why they are now bombing them, bombing everything they can see!"

Pash said he is convinced "the new era is where the nations of the North are oppressing the rest of the world," the South. "In this North-South divide, Australia's only future is to stand with the South."