

## Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas

### 'The Queen is coming!'

*The Queen will soon visit Australia, where her company, Rio Tinto, is waging war against the trade unions.*

One of the world's largest mining companies, BHP, has launched a campaign to destroy trade unionism "downunder," by offering "individual contracts" to its workers in the Pilbara iron ore region, in Western Australia. BHP's tactic shocked many union leaders, because the company, known as the "Big Australian," has had a reputation, dating back to BHP chief Essington Lewis's collaboration as Director General of Munitions with Labor Prime Minister John Curtin during World War II, for treating its unionized workforce fairly. Labor leaders expect the new practice to be spread to other BHP locations, nationwide. Many Australian unions have protested with work stoppages, coordinated by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).

The reason for BHP's about-face lies not merely in the firm's bottom line, but is part of a deeper political/economic assault on the nation, coordinated by the British Crown, using Rio Tinto, the world's largest mining company, which has come to exert enormous influence over BHP, its one-time rival. Behind Rio Tinto stands the company's dominant shareholder, Queen Elizabeth II, whose private fortune is estimated at \$25-50 billion.

Using Rio Tinto, and now BHP, the Crown intends to crush what is left of the trade union movement, which, since even before Australia's establishment as a nation with Federation in 1901, has been the major force in fights over tariff protection, national banking, and other means to establish Australia's sovereignty against the Crown and its City of London financiers.

Prime Minister John Howard told the *Canberra Times* on Nov. 14, 1999, "The Queen has an intense interest in Australia." The Queen and her Privy Council, the ruling body of the British Commonwealth, place a high value on Australia for two reasons: It is one of the world's richest repositories of raw materials, and the British seek to dominate the raw materials business, as paper becomes worthless in the coming financial crash; and, Australia is the British "stepping stone" to Asia, as outlined in a 1995 report of the Royal Institute of International Affairs—an institution heavily funded, since its inception in 1919, by Rio Tinto. Australia, for example, took the point for the British last year in hiving off East Timor (with its huge offshore oil and gas deposits) from Indonesia, to the advantage of British or British-allied firms.

The current assault on the trade unions began in December 1996, when Howard's ruling Liberal/National Coalition government passed the most anti-union legislation of the century. The "Workplace Relations Act" was written by Rio Tinto executive Mike Angwin and two associates. As the deepening global depression weakened BHP, historically known more for high-tech steel manufacturing than for mining, Rio Tinto moved in.

Former Rio Tinto head John Ralph, Australia's most influential businessman, joined BHP's board in 1997. Soon afterwards, the two firms began to discuss merging their iron ore operations in Western Australia. The deal reportedly fell apart because Rio Tinto was unhappy with BHP's mining costs, compared to Rio Tinto's

lower ones, the latter achieved by a ruthless assault on Rio Tinto's workforce. Though that deal essentially fell through, mining insiders report that Ralph's presence on the board, together with the proposed merger and its emphasis on "cost-cutting," helped effect BHP's anti-union shift.

The Queen and Royal Consort Prince Philip will visit Australia for two weeks starting March 17. They have been very active in Australia, at least since their Royal Tour in 1963. In 1975, acting through her vainglorious governor, Sir John Kerr, Elizabeth sacked Prime Minister Gough Whitlam because he and his Minister for Mines and Energy, the tough old Labor patriot R.F.X. "Rex" Connor, had announced that they would "buy back the farm," i.e., buy out Rio Tinto and other multinationals that were looting Australia's mineral resources for what Whitlam called "pennies to the dollar." Prince Philip founded the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) shortly after the 1963 tour, as a branch of his World Wildlife Fund. The ACF, whose primary funder has always been Rio Tinto, established the greenie and Aboriginal land rights movements to lock away Australia's mineral deposits from anyone except themselves. Aboriginal land rights claims have tied up more than 40% of Australia.

The Queen held an unprecedented one-hour audience for radical Aboriginal leaders at Buckingham Palace on Oct. 13, 1999. Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission chairman Gatjil Djerkurra, asked if the Queen supported the "indigenous reconciliation process" (i.e., land rights), told the *Canberra Times*, "Absolutely. There's no question about that. She's gone through a lot of countries where reconciliation has been possible between indigenous people and so-called colonized nations. It was a process she supported."