

Australia's Emergency Laws Mimic Hitler's

by Allen Douglas

In late March, Australia's government suddenly rammed through the lower house of Parliament, draconian emergency "anti-terror" laws—anti-immigrant and anti-political freedom legislation which goes far beyond anything discussed in the post-Sept. 11 United States. The laws now up for vote in the Australian Senate as early as May 14, are the precise equivalent of Adolf Hitler's *Notverordnung* (emergency decree) of Feb. 28, 1933.

Following the infamous Reichstag Fire, and formally called the "Decree for the Protection of the People and the State," the Nazis' *Notverordnung* abolished free speech, freedom of the press, sanctity of the home, security of mail and telephonic communications, and freedom to assemble or form organizations. Most importantly, it allowed Hitler to arbitrarily designate "enemies of the state," and eliminate them. Within a month, he was building the first concentration camp, at Dachau.

But while Hitler had to wait until after his *Notverordnung* were enacted to build concentration camps, seven such camps, ringed with razor wire, are already functioning in Australia. They hold 3,500 inmates, charged with no crime, who are subject to daily psychological and physical torture; at least two more such camps are presently being built—these new ones with electrified fences.

The Strategic Context

Australia is the Bush Administration's loyal ally in the "war on terror," even more so than Tony Blair's Britain itself. But though the Australian government's emergency decrees in part reflect U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft's round-ups of, and security actions against, Arab-American and Muslim groups and individuals, they go far beyond those precedents.

Presidential pre-candidate Lyndon LaRouche forecast already during Ashcroft's confirmation battle, months before Sept. 11, the emergence of measures exactly like Hitler's *Notverordnung*—and not only in the United States—*because of the global financial breakdown under way*. Given the necessity to manage the population under conditions of the global financial crash already then unfolding, LaRouche warned, "You're going to get crisis management. Where members of the special warfare types, of the secret government, the secret police teams, will set off provocations, which will be used to bring about dictatorial powers and emotion, in the name of crisis management." Since Sept. 11, Ashcroft

has acted precisely as LaRouche forecast, by rounding up thousands of people and holding them incommunicado; by Gestapo-style raids against moderate Islamic groups in Virginia and other states; by his attempt to establish a multi-million person spy apparatus, the "U.S.A. Freedom Corps"; by the establishment of secret military tribunals for "terrorism"; by the rapid moves to eliminate attorney-client privilege, etc.

"Sept. 11" is also the stated justification for Australia's proposed new laws. The leadership of both of Australia's major parties, Prime Minister John Howard's ruling Liberal Party/National Party coalition and the opposition Australian Labor Party (ALP), are strongly inclined, for their own reasons, to follow the United States wherever it leads them. Australia is in charge of the Persian Gulf naval blockade of Iraq; has deployed its Special Air Services in combat in Afghanistan; has had extensive joint military exercises with the United States in northern Australia; and Howard has indicated his openness to participating in a war against Iraq.

On March 21, Howard's government suddenly handed an astonished House of Representatives the eight bills comprising the most sweeping changes in Australia's security and intelligence measures since World War II. The bills had been prepared in utter secrecy, such that even backbench (non-Cabinet) MPs in Howard's own party had initially revolted when first told of them. The opposition Labor Party and the smaller parties were given precisely *16 hours* (overnight) to examine 100 pages of legislation and 100 pages of explanatory memoranda, before debate began on them the following day. The bills were passed and are now before the Senate, which reconvenes on May 14.

Bespeaking the government's fanatical commitment, the Senate's Legal and Constitution Committee allowed *two weeks* for public hearings. The bills are: the Australian Security Intelligence Organization Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill 2002; the Border Security Legislation Amendment Bill 2002; the Criminal Code Amendment (Espionage and Related Offenses) Bill 2002; the Security Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Bill 2002; the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism Bill 2002; the Telecommunications Interception Legislation Amendment Bill 2002; and the Criminal Code Amendment (Suppression of Terrorist Bombings) Bill 2002; and the Criminal Code Amendment (Anti-Hoax and Other Measures) Act 2002.

Australia's 'Notverordnungen'

The last of these has already passed both houses, and is now law. It provides for two years in jail for "a person to use a postal or like service in such a way as would be regarded by a reasonable person as being, in all the circumstances, menacing, harassing or offensive. . . . The offense would cover material that would make a person apprehensive as to his or her safety or well-being or the safety of his or her property as well as containing offensive or abusive language

or derogatory religious, racial or sexual connotations." Under this legislation, anyone sending out a newspaper or magazine which, for instance, warned of the global financial crash, could be judged to be making people "apprehensive."

The remaining, still-pending legislation defines a new offense of "terrorism" which is so broad, that a wide range of political activity, including certain instances of picketing, public demonstrations, and civil disobedience, could be labeled "terrorist." For instance, a representative of Attorney General Daryl Williams' office replied in the affirmative, when he was asked in Parliament if actions taken (such as cutting a lock with boltcutters) during a recent protest against the internment of refugees at the brutal Woomera detention center in South Australia, would count as "terrorism" under the new laws.

The Attorney General would be empowered to proscribe organizations using four criteria of "terrorism," including the vaguely worded catch-all, "likely to endanger the security or integrity of the [Australian] Commonwealth or another country." (Existing law refers to the "*safety and integrity*" of Australia, with no mention of other countries.) Williams bragged that this substitution of a single word, "security," radically widens the scope of existing laws. Under the legislation, organizations could be "proscribed," *whether or not they have been charged or convicted of anything*; individuals who assist them, or are members or them, could be imprisoned for 25 years. The law would place the onus on the group, to prove that they are *not* terrorists.

The legislation may also be applied retrospectively, i.e., on any previous conduct now deemed "terrorist." That is, if the person who cut the lock at Woomera were a member of an organization, that organization could be banned, and anyone associated with it be thrown in jail for 25 years to life. Additionally, terrorist acts are very broadly defined, and include "serious harm to persons, serious damage to property, and serious interference with or destruction of electronic systems, done with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause." One prominent lawyer, Greg Carne of the University of Tasmania, has noted that "organized and persistent protest tactics by community pressure groups to flood politicians with e-mails, faxes, and phone calls" could fall under this legislation; that "groups advocating a wide variety of political causes could be judged as 'endangering the integrity of the Commonwealth or of another country' "; and that "many other persons beyond those physically engaging in such direct activities would also be potentially liable for related 'terrorism' offenses."

The Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), the equivalent of Britain's domestic intelligence agency MI5, is to be transformed into a secret police, with powers to detain people for up to six days, without a lawyer, and without the right to remain silent. Should they exercise their right to remain silent, or fail to produce something, such as a document, which the government may rightly or wrongly



Some 3,500 asylum seekers in Australia, charged with no crimes, have been placed in indefinite detention in a growing number of isolated private prison camps for political detainees. In their desperation, some throw themselves on the concertina wire or otherwise commit suicide; others ask to fight against Australia's growing fascism.

claim they have, they may be jailed for five years. The detainee need not be a terrorist suspect, just someone whom the police think *might* have information about terrorism. Lawyers and journalists would be major targets, and attorney/client privilege would be eliminated forever. This notion of “espionage” is no longer limited to classified information, but extends to almost any government-originated information, putting journalists, whistleblowers, and political activists in the crosshairs. Unprecedented secret trials are provided for, merely if a court “is satisfied that it is in the interest of the security or defense of the Commonwealth.”

Already, by proclamation of then-Defense Minister Peter Reith in October, Australia’s super-secret Defense Signals Directorate (DSD) has been given far wider powers to spy on Australian citizens, for purposes of “maintaining Australia’s economic well-being . . . promoting Australia’s foreign relations . . . preventing or investigating the commission of a serious crime [or] responding to an apparent threat to the safety of a person,” among other things. Previously, the DSD could only spy on Australians within Australia if they were working for a foreign power. Now, anyone posing a serious challenge to the fanatical commitment of Australia’s two major parties to globalization, for example, would clearly be fair game under the new laws.

The Concentration Camps

One of the clearest markers for the developing fascist police state in Australia, is the practice of “mandatory deten-

tion” for asylum seekers, a policy unique to Australia among Western nations. The 3,500 unfortunates now in the “detention centers”—actually concentration camps—include over 400 children under 18, of whom 50 have no family. Most camps are located in remote areas of the Australian continent, hundreds or thousands of miles from civilization, or on Australia’s even remoter possessions, such as the Cocos and Christmas Islands thousands of miles offshore. Little or no news can leak out about what happens in these camps. They are usually surrounded by several layers of barbed wire, topped with razor wire.

According to studies, many, or even most of the camps’ inmates had already experienced torture or the death or “disappearance” of one of their family members before they came to Australia; many have fled Afghanistan or Iraq, particularly Shi’ites from Iraq whom the United States encouraged to rebel against Saddam Hussein in 1990. They have usually paid their entire pathetic life’s savings to a smuggler, risking their and their children’s lives on leaky boats, usually sailing from Indonesia, in hopes of starting a new life in Australia. One of these boats sunk recently, and 353 men, women and children died.

Having caught and interned them, the Australian government initially keeps asylum seekers separate from other inmates—who might tell them of their rights to file for legal help—until the allotted 30 days has expired. The camps are run for profit (as was Auschwitz), by Australasian Correctional Management (ACM), a subsidiary of the notorious

American firm, Wackenhut. Guards frequently beat or psychologically abuse the inmates, while medical care is almost nonexistent, because the “doctors” are all on the payroll of ACM.

Former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser has described one of the most notorious of the camps—Woomera, in the remote desert of South Australia—as a “hell-hole.” Maqsood Alshams, a journalist who fled repression in Bangladesh, only to be interned in Australia, described the camps in the February 2002 *New Citizen* newspaper of LaRouche’s associates, the Citizens Electoral Council: “It’s worse than a medium-security prison. I mean, in a prison, people have minimum rights as human beings, being punished and serving sentences for crimes they have committed. But in detention centers, none of the people have any rights. People are treated like animals.”

Another inmate, Dr. Aamer Sultan, a Shi’ite from southern Iraq, co-authored a study of conditions in the Villawood camp with Zachary Steel, a former ACM psychiatrist, who, like most psychologists hired by ACM, quit in disgust. The study, published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*, described the deepening psychological depression which refugees typically experience, as they realize that they have little or no hope of getting Australian citizenship, and that they may stay in the camps indefinitely. An “overwhelming sense of impending doom” gives way to psychotic illness, including self-mutilations, thoughts of suicide (two-thirds regularly contemplate suicide), and full-blown paranoid delusions. Riots, hunger strikes, attempted breakouts, and suicide attempts are common, and met with further repression.

Earlier this year, inmates at Woomera dug mass graves and buried themselves up to their necks in over 100°F heat, while others slashed their wrists, jumped head-first onto the razor wire, or swallowed detergent. Some 200 went on hunger strike and sewed their lips shut, so that the guards could not force-feed them, as did many distraught children as well, imitating their desperate parents.

On Christmas Island in December 2001, some 180 refugees were locked in a sports hall the size of two basketball courts for more than a month, although at least one woman among them had tested positive for typhoid. A health professional who visited the site told the *Australian Financial Review* on Dec. 11, that conditions in the hall were “devastating. . . . My first impression was fundamental disbelief that these living conditions could exist in Australia, in a supervised way,” he said.

Police State Emerging

Notwithstanding their nominal differences, the Liberal/National Party coalition and the Labor Party have collaborated over the past two years, both at state and federal levels, to ram through fascist legislation which had already established many of the preconditions for a dictatorship, long before the Sept. 11 provocation (see “Australia Moves Toward a Fascist Police State,” *EIR*, Oct. 19, 2001, and “Australia and Hitler’s

Dictatorship,” *EIR*, June 19, 2001). The Defense Legislation Amendment (Aid to Civilian Authorities) Act 2000, for example, authorizes the army to kill Australian civilians.

Australians despise these two parties for their fanatical support of globalization over the past two decades. Thus, as in France, Germany, the United States, and other Western nations, Australia’s “major” parties are collapsing; they view these sorts of draconian laws as their only means to maintain power. In the federal election in November 2001, the ALP recorded its worst vote since 1933, while the equally hated Coalition only won because it cooked up a “boat people” crisis on the eve of the election, and rode a *vox populi* “tough-on-refugees” policy to victory. The parties have colluded to change electoral requirements, to try to preclude any other political force from emerging to challenge them.

Their collapse is shown in the state of Western Australia, home to 1.4 million of Australia’s 20 million citizens. Recent discussions with political insiders there have revealed a tightly held secret—the membership figures of the “major” parties. These show these “big” parties to be Potemkin villages: The ruling ALP has some 1,600 members, the Liberal Party (which ruled the state for eight years until February 2001) has only 800, and the rural-based National Party has 1,200. By contrast, the new “minor” party, the Curtin Labor Alliance, founded by the LaRouche-associated CEC and the Municipal Employees Union in April 2000, recruited 800 members within a mere eight months to contest the election (but were kept off the ballot by dirty tricks from the Western Australian Electoral Commission). The CEC itself is recognized by insiders to be the fastest-growing political party in the country. It is no surprise, then, that a leading civil rights lawyer pointedly warned the CEC, “If I were you, I would be extremely concerned about these new laws.”

A storm of protest has arisen against these bills from many quarters, from trade union leaders to Supreme Court justices. Notwithstanding, the laws will most likely pass, at least in slightly diluted form, unless opponents face the reality, uniquely outlined by Lyndon LaRouche: The global financial crash is driving this push for dictatorships, in the United States, Australia, and elsewhere; and all modern-day “terrorism” is irregular warfare run by governments, factions of governments, or private financial powers equivalent to governments—including the attempted U.S. coup d’état of Sept. 11.

Otherwise, those opposed to these heinous laws will continue to bleat like sheep, all the way to the slaughterhouse, with no effective answer to the seemingly all-powerful argument: “Yes, these laws are draconian, but we must have them because of Sept. 11.” The impotent rejoinder often now heard, that “we have never had terrorism in Australia,” will disappear overnight, with the first provocation on Australian soil, or with another Sept. 11-magnitude attack elsewhere. And this when fascist Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon—the creator of Hamas—is predicting waves of suicide bombers worldwide.