

Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas

Australia's Nazi Concentration Camps

Resistance is mounting to the psychological and physical torture pervasive in the refugee "detention centers."

In 1933, Hitler used the pretext of the Nazi-rigged, Feb. 27 fire at the Reichstag (parliament), to ram through his *Notverordnung* (Emergency Decree) the next day, which established his dictatorship; only then, could he build his concentration camps, beginning with Dachau in March.

Australia's march into fascism is proceeding a bit differently: They first built their camps, and are only now attempting to pass their *Notverordnung* (see *EIR*, May 3).

The seven existing camps (more are being built) are presently being used to house refugees, usually desperate "boat people": individuals and families fleeing Afghanistan and Iraq, who gave their pitiful savings to a people-smuggler who packed them into decrepit ships for the dangerous journey from Indonesia. Since the federal election of November 2001, the country's "refugee policy" has dominated Australian political debate. Beginning in August last year, the incumbent Liberal/National party coalition government of Prime Minister John Howard, orchestrated the highly publicized "Tampa incident," in which the Australian Navy turned back one vessel of boat people, and rode to victory over the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in an extremely close election. Even more chilling, former ambassador to Cambodia, Tony Kevin, has charged that the government very likely deliberately let a refugee boat sink in mid-October, with a loss of 353 lives.

The seven camps, several of them in remote parts of the Australian continent, hold some 4,000 inmates behind layers of razor wire, often in 100°F

heat. The camps are privately run by the Australasian Correctional Management company (ACM), a division of the notorious Wackenhut Corp. in the United States. Although Canberra has tried to enforce a strict news embargo on any information from the camps, as word of the conditions has begun to leak out, a horrified opposition has arisen, both against the camps, and the inhuman policy of indefinite detention upon which they are based.

Inmates are held for years under torturous conditions, including no medical treatment. For instance, UNICEF's Ambassador for Children, former Australian federal court Justice Marcus Einfeld, in mid-May stated that "I do not much like historical parallels, but some SS guards did little different in the name of the Third Reich." In addition to his position with the UN Children's Fund, Einfeld is the chairman of the Alliance of Health Professionals Concerned About the Health of Asylum Seekers and Their Children, comprised of 29 Australian medical organizations, including all of the country's major doctors and nurses organizations. The Alliance has called for the emergency release of all children and families from the camps, and has just issued a 77-page report with numerous case studies and medical analyses, which proved the terrible effects on physical and mental health from long-term, mandatory detention.

Almost simultaneously, the Australian Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace released its own, 61-page report in which it found that detainees were suffering

far more serious trauma than had yet been admitted, and catalogued an astounding 264 incidents of self-harm by desperate, often mentally ill inmates over the past eight months, 29 of which involved children. Bespeaking the desperation which is common in the camps, including hunger strikes in which parents and children sew their lips shut in protest, is the testimony the commission heard from one 17-year-old: "I saw an Afghani guy cut his own throat in my compound. He was working with me in the kitchen that day, and after work he went outside and cut himself everywhere. It was really bad. Even the [ACM] officers started crying." Other inmates have hurled themselves onto the razor wire.

Dr. Dominic Meaney, who worked at the Woomera camp in the South Australian desert, recently blasted the ACM for refusing to immunize inmates against serious illnesses, such as polio, the highly infectious hepatitis B, and tetanus, pertussis, and diphtheria, despite the fact that an extremely high 5% of the inmates tested positive for hepatitis B. That disease, Meaney noted, could be spread by "one drop of blood in a swimming pool."

The ACM did not inoculate inmates, because it would have cost \$40,000. Dr. Paul Hemming, the president of the Royal Australia College of General Practitioners, and a member of the Einfeld Alliance, also blasted the ACM policy—which is actually the government's—as "outrageous." Furthermore, noted Hemming, "The cost of vaccinating refugees and asylum seekers is minuscule compared to the cost of treating them on an individual basis should they become ill on their release—let alone the cost of treating an outbreak of a disease such as hepatitis in the broader community."