

## Australia Dossier by Allen Douglas

### Draconian 'Anti-Terror' Laws Passed

*Without the intervention by LaRouche's associates in the Citizens Electoral Council, they would have been far worse.*

The Australian Parliament on June 27 passed the most far-reaching changes to the nation's legal system since World War II. As first proposed by the Liberal/National party government of Prime Minister John Howard and passed in the House of Representatives in late March with the acquiescence of Howard's nominal opposition in the Australian Labor Party (ALP), the "anti-terror" bills were a carbon copy of Adolf Hitler's infamous *Notverordnung* (emergency decree) of Feb. 28, 1933, following the Reichstag fire. Among other things, the bills: allowed the Attorney General to ban any organization he desired, whether or not it were convicted or even charged with any crime, and to jail its members and "informal supporters" for 25 years; created an extremely broad new "terrorism" offense which could snare many union actions, civil disobedience, and even ordinary political activity in its net; turned Australia's FBI, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), into a Gestapo, with the right to detain anyone indefinitely on the slightest pretext, with no lawyer, no right to remain silent, and a five-year jail sentence for non-cooperation; allowed wholesale tapping of phones, faxes, and e-mail with no warrants; and reversed the onus of proof, such that someone would have to prove that he or she is *not* a terrorist, or has not aided a terrorist.

The bills, comprising 100 pages of complex legislation accompanied by 100 pages of explanation, had been dumped on the House of Representa-

tives only the day before they were passed. Although there had been rumors about them, no one, including the ALP, which signed off on them the next day, had previously seen the legislation. Even after their passage in the House, the press was curiously silent about laws that would have made Hitler proud; although some civil liberties advocates spoke out, there was no effective campaign to *stop* the bills, until LaRouche's associates in the Citizens Electoral Council (CEC), Australia's fastest-growing political party, entered the fray.

An initial CEC campaign of phone organizing and mass leafleting caused such an uproar, that the government was forced on May 15 to postpone introducing the bills into the Senate until June 17. With the extra time, the CEC poured out tens of thousands of phone calls, and one-half million leaflets, entitled "End Them, Don't Amend Them!" such that Members of Parliament were soon receiving 200 phone calls, e-mails, and faxes per day. The mobilization reached a high point on June 12, with the appearance of a full-page ad in the country's major national newspaper, *The Australian*, with the signatures of 200 prominent Australians, beginning with former Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Jim Cairns, and including trade unionists, civil libertarians, Aborigines, artists, local government officials, former MPs, and many leaders of the country's large Muslim population. The ad reprinted the crucial section of Hitler's *Notverordnung*, and declared that "the ripping up of civil liberties proposed by the

Howard government is, in the most literal sense of the term, *fascist*, and must be thrown out."

Discussion of the ad, and the avalanche of calls and e-mails, dominated the Senate debate on the bills in the days before their passage on June 27. When the smoke had cleared, some very significant changes had been made: The unilateral power of the Attorney General to ban organizations was thrown out, replaced by the stricture that only organizations named as terrorist by the United Nations could be banned; the definition of "terrorism" was tightened significantly; and the tapping of phones, faxes, and e-mail with no warrants was thrown out, as was the reversal of the onus of proof. The uproar around the ASIO bill was such, that it was postponed until Parliament reconvenes on Aug. 19. Notwithstanding those positive changes, and the potential to water down or defeat the ASIO bill, the legislation is still draconian on many accounts, such as granting Australia's foreign minister authority for "back-door banning" of organizations, through freezing their financial assets.

In the wake of the uproar unleashed by the CEC, the bills could easily have been defeated altogether, but for the treachery of the ALP. The latter huffed and puffed about "civil liberties" (and, under enormous pressure, did force some useful changes) but, when the time came, voted with the government, despite having the numbers to simply vote the bills down. And, when the Green party proposed an amendment to eliminate the foreign minister's banning powers, the ALP allied with the government against it. Nor did the ALP-allied Australian Council of Trade Unions, representing 1.9 million unionists, and itself a key target of the legislation, at any point mobilize to do anything effective against the bills.