

# Economy is key issue in Australian vote

by Allen Douglas

Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke has set the date for Australia's next federal election as March 24, well before his Labour Party's term in office ends in late 1990. Since Labour has done much to destroy Australia's economy, Prime Minister Hawke thinks that if his party is to have any chance of being reelected, it must hold the election sooner rather than later, before the Australian economic crisis breaks out in full force.

Australia's economy is in a shambles. Home mortgage rates are over 17%; bank loans for most favored customers begin at 22% and rise from there; credit card interest rates run at 30-35%. The Australian Small Businessmen's Association's New South Wales branch just issued a 200-page report predicting a dramatic further round of bankruptcies in the immediate future. The rural sector has been hit perhaps hardest of all, as the number of independent family farmers has plummeted from 186,000 to 126,000 over Labour's term in office; every five hours, one more family farm goes under. The production of wheat, one of Australia's chief crops, collapsed by over 50% in the past year.

Nowhere is the crisis more evident than in the country's foreign debt, which now stands at over \$100 billion. With a population of only 18 million, this makes Australia one of the most highly indebted nations in the world, with greater debt per capita than Mexico or Brazil.

## 'Opposition' offers no alternative

Though the rate of collapse has accelerated dramatically during Labour's present term in office beginning in 1983, Labour and its chief opposition in the Liberal-National coalition have shared virtually identical policies of "free trade," deregulation, high interest rates, astronomical tax levels, and related anti-industrial policies, since the Labour government of Goff Whitlam initiated the present process of destruction in 1972.

That the two parties have merely alternated terms in office while the country as a whole has collapsed, is no secret to many Australians. A recent national poll showed that 30% of all Australians want neither of the major parties in office. In parliamentary elections early last year in Canberra, the

nation's capital, independent candidates received more votes than Labour and the Liberal-National coalition combined. In the December 1989 parliamentary elections in the state of Queensland, the two major parties became so hysterical about the prospect of victories by independents, that they swapped preferences, that is, despite their ostensible bitter rivalry, they recommended that their supporters cast their second ("preference") votes for each other, to freeze out independents.

Australia's political and financial establishment is employing a range of dirty tricks, including vote fraud, slander, frameups, and worse against independent candidates, and against the anti-malthusian and anti-Fabian "freedom movement" from which those candidates are drawn. Recent targets of harassment include Brian Wilshire, host of one of Australia's most popular radio talk shows on Radio 2GB in Sydney, who has reportedly had a government agent assigned to him to monitor his exposés of vote fraud. Another target is investigative journalist Ross W. Bensted, editor of the 50,000 monthly circulation newspaper *The Citizen*. Bensted has published articles on vote fraud, and has investigated Australia's extensive drug traffic, a spinoff of the country's role as a transshipment center for drugs coming via Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle into the United States. Freemasonic elements in the Queensland police force are presently trying to frame up Bensted on assault charges, charges filed by a convicted burglar to whom the police have offered a deal.

Ultimately, the success of Australia's "freedom movement" will turn upon its ability to develop a program for national economic recovery, and to mobilize the citizenry around that program. Two leaders of the Citizens' Electoral Councils (CEC), a key component of that movement, with 150 local branches spread across Australia, spent much of February in discussions with the economics staff of *EIR* toward that end. Queensland farmers John Koehler and Maurice Hetherington recounted the industrial and technological capabilities which Australia once possessed, which have been either downgraded or destroyed, but which must be resurrected in an even more advanced form: an expansive auto industry, a shipbuilding industry, an aircraft industry which built the highly regarded Canberra fighter plane, a highly developed machine tool sector, a nuclear research program among the most advanced in the world in the 1960s, which worked on high temperature gas-cooled reactors, among other technologies.

As John Koehler, a co-founder of the CEC movement, commented, "The employment figures pretty much tell it all, how we have slid from a high-technology manufacturing economy to a Third World-style raw materials exporter, with the collapse in standard of living, literacy, etc. which one would expect. In 1970, we had 1,320,000 employed in manufacturing. By 1988, this had fallen to only 1,119,000, despite the fact that the labor force grew from 5.4 million to 7.3 million over the same period."