

# P.M. Howard's Boat Came In ...Just in Time

## *Australia's November 2001 election*

Reportage by Denis McCormack

Over a month before September 11, I had booked my ticket back to Melbourne via Egypt from October's "The Social Contract Writer's Workshop" in Washington, D.C. and didn't change my plans.

The good news was that all the archaeological and architectural attractions in Egypt were deserted by normal standards, so I was informed, with Tourist Security Police outnumbering tourists at some sites. The bad news was that with tourism down seventy to ninety percent by some estimates, the nation's biggest foreign-currency earner has all but dried up and those dependent on tourism at street level – the swarms of salesmen, touts, sharks, scammers, and commission men – were leaner and keener in focusing their attention on a vastly reduced number of tourists.

As a Westerner I experienced no animosity, though clearly there was no shortage of sympathetic discussion of anyone who would make a point to America about its foreign policy on Middle Eastern affairs. Ahmad Abdullah, psychologist and director of the website Islam-on-line, says:

*Our people are deeply frustrated by everything in their lives. When you are frustrated you are paralysed, you leave it to others to act, and sometimes applaud, however wrong the act. Emotionally bin Laden did for the people what our local terrorists used to do for them when they were at war with the government. They don't really like the terrorists but they like to see America, the big devil, being hit just like they did their government. But their support for this Islamic*

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*Rambo is fading fast. In their hearts, they never really expected him to succeed, so they quickly adjust to his defeat.<sup>1</sup>*

Of their financial losses due to the tourism downturn, all were resigned, and some were philosophical. They'd seen it after the Gulf War broke out in 1990 and again after the massacre of foreign tourists at Luxor in 1997 after which the tourist industry took nearly two years to recover.

Cairo, with seventeen million, plus three million daily commuters, is a tight fit with or without tourists. Cairo is a better-fed, better-plumbed, better-wired, cleaner Calcutta without monsoons. The two cities share the pain, strain, and frustrations associated with ever-expanding populations pushing ahead of adequate infrastructure establishment. Egypt's government does recognize their population problem and devotes resources to public awareness campaigns, which are producing a slowdown in population growth but not fast enough.

Before heading south to Aswan, I filled out a postal vote at the Australian Embassy, since the federal election was still over a week away but I wouldn't be back in Cairo in time. It was the first national election since 1990 in which I wasn't standing for office as an anti-immigration/anti-multiculturalism candidate in the hope of bringing attention to these issues. It was also the first election in which I could confidently predict the winners because of their stand against illegal immigration and the shadow boxing on multiculturalism thereby engendered. [Editor's note: Mr. McCormack's party is unambiguously named *Australians Against Further Immigration, AAIF.*]

Slumped in the roof garden of my half-star backpacker's hotel, after a dusty day in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor, and courtesy of crackling BBC/CNN TV world service mixed in with the more vocal local calls to prayer, I learned of Prime Minister Howard's November 10 third-term, increased-majority, electoral triumph. It

could have been very different.

Only eight months before the election, when all the pundits and polls had Howard's conservative coalition dead and buried, a probing op-ed in Melbourne's *Age*, 10 March 2001, by associate editor, Shaun Carney titled "Who is the real John Howard?" analyzed the credibility problems he faced in securing a third term from various segments of the electorate considered to be increasingly disenchanted. Carney rightly states that when Howard became Prime Minister in March, 1996, it was to rid Australia of the Labor government and P.M. Paul:

*Keating's high-paced embrace of Asia, economic change and those large-scale symbolic social issues, reconciliation, and the republic...and that he would "never ever" introduce a GST [a Goods and Services Tax which he subsequently did introduce to much popular disclaim in his second term] for at least 10 years, there has been a solid core of voters unhappy with changes in Australian society. Since as far back as 1991, when an Australians Against Further Immigration candidate [your correspondent] secured 6.8 percent at a by-election in the Liberal held Federal seat of Menzies in eastern Melbourne [the subject of a favorable Australian "Sixty Minutes" story], what is now known as the Hansonite element has figured in national politics. At a series of by-elections in safe Liberal and Labor seats throughout the early 1990's, AAFI candidates picked up between 6 per cent and 14 per cent. But the emergence of Pauline Hanson during Howard's first term fouled his ability to appeal to this conservative constituency. Since forming One Nation in 1997, Hanson has wrestled this constituency from AAFI, and implicitly Howard – and now she threatens to use it to bring him down. On the economic front, Howard has shown that as Prime Minister he is as much a neo-liberal deregulationist as ever; his disavowal of the GST and the implicit questioning of the effects of globalization before the 1996 election turned out to be window dressing. He didn't mean it, and now in some important respects, Howard finds himself without a sound political base. He cannot give full voice to his innate*

*social conservatism because that would further harm his support in the traditional urban Liberal heartland.*

*He cannot come out and defend his strong commitment to neo-liberal economics and fiscal discipline because that would only give him more grief in the rural and provincial areas and the outer suburbs.*

*Having said various things at various times to win over different segments of the electorate in order to attain power, John Howard seemingly now cannot be the one thing he always said he would be: himself.<sup>2</sup>*

So what happened to turn things around so emphatically to Howard's advantage? Yes, Howard is considered to be a competent branch manager of the internationalized Australian economy – debt reduction, low interest rates, budget surpluses, fireproofing against the Asian economic meltdown, trade surpluses, lower unemployment, introduction of family friendly policies, pork barrelling of young homebuyers, seniors, and rural constituencies – all at a time of looming global economic downturn and with our big trading partners like Japan, Europe and the USA in, and heading into, recession. No doubt the big end of town was pleased, but most of these "positives" for the Howard government were present or emerging before and during its dive in popularity. The voters no longer respond to only bread, circuses and happy spin about the economy, which they suspect is suspect.

The more obvious *mise en scene* was immigration and multiculturalism's decades of dirty washing, finally getting an airing, flapping on the front pages. Yes – that was front-page, frequently with big, scary headlines and photos: Illegal immigrants rioting and burning detention centers, after having asylum claims rejected; Asian drug lords, people smugglers and money launderers running rings round police, and occasionally apprehended; teenage ethnic gang wars; former Red Army PLA members recruited and imported for Asian drug gang wars in Sydney; conviction of Muslim Lebanese youth gang members in Sydney who were specifically targeting white Anglo-Celtic Australian girls for gang rape, "You deserve it because you're an Australian" (Front page headline, *Sydney Daily Telegraph* 24 August 2001) This last-mentioned multicultural outrage was dislodged from the

front page in Sydney only by the arrival in Australian waters of the Norwegian freighter, *Tampa*, with its 450 Afghan and Iraqi boatpeople. From 28 August, the *Tampa* boatpeople story, and P.M. Howard's determination not to let them land on Australian shores (his public support on this issue was polled at 70 percent to 90 percent by various organizations) dominated the front pages.

On September 10, in the *Melbourne Age*, Carney had another article, this time outlining the turnaround in

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Prime Minister Howard's electoral fortunes:

*On the day of the 1998 election 936, 621 Australians, or 8.3% of the national electorate voted for Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party in the lower house. In the ballot for the Senate, the vote was even higher; 1, 007, 439 voters or 8.99% of the total.*

*Since then One Nation has descended into a strange, conflicted existence as legal challenges and personal acrimony have hacked away at its effectiveness... [Because of] the party's organisational ineptitude, and with Hanson's charismatic glow faded a little, <sup>3</sup> much of what might be regarded as the One Nation constituency is likely to be up for grabs at the election.*

*This constituency should, by rights, belong to John Howard. One Nation voters in 1998 were the battlers who got away from Howard. They are unhappy with politics-as-usual, with multiculturalism, with the Asianisation of Australia, with the impact of global forces on the economy, with Aborigines claiming greater*

*rights... when Howard was yet to attain office, the enemies of a cohesive Australian society were within – to wit, within the Labor government and the minority pressure groups that controlled it.*

*Five years on, with Howard holding office and determined to secure another term, the enemies are outside Australia. They are the criminals who want to land untold numbers of illegal immigrants on our shores, and the corrupt Asian officials who allow them passage. They are the illegal immigrants themselves, whom Howard is driven to convince that Australia will no longer be a "soft touch." They are the foreign governments who want to tell Australia what to do, who Howard also said last week made his "blood boil..."*

*Naturally, he aims to win back many more voters than just the One Nation constituency with his stance on asylum seekers, and the early signs are that he is succeeding... His first stint as [opposition] leader in the 1980's was cruelled by the response to his call for the pace of Asian immigration to be slowed...*

Carney concludes that Howard looks set to win: *if Hanson's devotees decide that, after all, John Howard is an Australian nationalist just like them.*<sup>4</sup>

In the event, One Nation's vote was halved nationally to 4.3 percent at the November 10 election with neither Hanson nor any other One Nation candidate elected to either house of parliament.

The day following Carney's article was September 11 when the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington D.C. dislodged the *Tampa* boatpeople from the front pages, but only to page two and elsewhere. As it happened, Prime Minister Howard had been in Washington for pomp, ceremony, and talks with President George W. Bush on September 10. Still in D.C. on the morning of September 11, and just about to commence a press conference when word came through about the terrorist attacks, Howard was fated to be perfectly positioned, primed, and timed to declare Australia's

sorrow and support for America as the shock of the events began to sink in.

In confluence with the domestic events in Australia outlined above before September 11, the reality of a “khaki election” campaign in the name of national and global security against terror sealed the fate of Howard’s weak, vacillating Labor Party opposition, who belatedly and half-heartedly stood on Howard’s side of his line-in-the-sand about stopping the *Tampa*’s boatpeople landing in Australia. A quote on the issue from the Prime Minister was subsequently used far and wide across media election campaign advertisements under a suitably resolute photo of him: “We will decide who comes into this country, and the circumstances in which they come.”

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And so the election was won on an appeal to common sense and survival instincts, but it could have been very different. What if the *Tampa*, with another freighter or two, skippered by sensitive Scandinavians, steamed for Australia after rescuing not 450 Afghans and Iraqis, but a few thousand ethnic Chinese – a first wave fleeing bloody strife in Indonesia, Malaysia, Southern China, or Taiwan, Cambodia, or Vietnam again? And what if thousands of them, already holding the insurance of Australian passports, were legally streaming through Australian airports to safety at the same time as the ships carrying those without passports were heading our way? With the global and regional

predictions for population growth in developing countries, climate change, and environmental decline, together with the socio-political instability generated thereby, who would confidently rule out such future scenarios?<sup>5</sup>

Prime Minister Howard’s own seat of Bennelong in Sydney has a recently-arrived and growing ethnic Chinese constituency already capable of shaking him electorally should some circumstance such as the above focus their ethnic empathy toward a particular political outcome. The political class of all persuasions occasionally think about such things given the ethnic “branch stacking” already in evidence in both major parties, but they do not yet dare articulate what these internal party problems mean for the bigger political picture. It’s the same polite, tight-lipped, white-knuckle fear and denial that for too long has stifled intellectual discourse in relation to the outcomes of multiculturalism, or what the coming demographic decline from predominance will mean for white Australia’s majority culture.

Buried in a larger article on later marriage and lower fertility rates in Australia, the *Melbourne Herald Sun*’s report of 7 June 2001 by Michael Madigan titled, “Migration changes profile of the average Australian,” gave a rundown of the latest ABS figures (Australian Bureau of Statistics). Australia’s still largely sublimated existential problem was summed up in one single sentence, before the article went on through the numbers: “The latest snapshot of our population reveals the Australian-born Caucasian is a dying breed, replaced by predominantly Asian immigrants and their offspring.”<sup>6</sup> John Howard understands how racist, unnecessary, and underhanded this process became under Labor’s whole-of-government approach to Asianization for thirteen years prior to 1996, and that this is at the heart of Australia’s present uneasiness about the future.

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The Prime Minister and his Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, are Australia’s two longest-serving politicians, having entered parliament in 1974 and 1973 respectively, just as immigration was becoming the means of enforced multiracialism, and multiculturalism was becoming a bipartisan fashion statement.

On October 11, 2000, Minister Ruddock said:

*It is an often-repeated fallacy that governments only govern within the context of an electoral cycle. The most cursory glance at policy decisions in many fields including immigration, the environment, health and aged care, retirement income and the labour force, demonstrates that this is simply not true. Many public policy decisions resonate over decades. Indeed, the effect of some only becomes apparent years after they have been taken.*

And it follows that the cumulatively damaging effects of inappropriate immigration policy cannot be undone in a hurry.

So perhaps the *Tampa* episode was the ideal precedent for a loud and non-discriminatory “no,” given that the local Afghan/Iraqi community numbers are tiny compared to the burgeoning demographic, financial, and therefore growing political clout of the ethnic Chinese in Australia.

But signs of hope and awakening are everywhere of late, and better late than never! Britain and some European countries are building detention centers, which they are calling reception centers, broadly following the Australian model as Minister Ruddock has recently pointed out. *The Spectator* has an article in its 24 November edition, titled “What Enoch [Powell] was really saying.” Malaysia is deporting ten thousand illegal immigrants to Indonesia per month of its estimated five hundred thousand, and has recently had riots and arson in its detention centers. At the recent national elections in Norway, the government was defeated by a coalition of parties calling for tougher laws against asylum seekers and cuts to immigration. Similarly, Denmark’s government has been recently defeated by a party promising tough immigration reform. Even Pakistan is thinking hopefully about repatriation of Afghan refugees before too long.

Just after our election here, a few commentators calmly suggested that the time might be right for a rethink on multiculturalism. These suggestions produced a hysterical response from the majority of intellectuals still disoriented and bruised by the strength of Howard’s re-election. By late November, however, a new push to expand Australia’s population through increased immigration and enhanced diversity was launched by the captains of industry along with all the usual suspects. Among those who chimed in was Steve Bracks, the

governing Labor Premier of my home state, Victoria. He called for a substantial increase to the national immigration program [to 200,000 per annum!] and for the acceptance of more asylum seekers to boost economic activity, to enhance diversity, to help care for an aging population, etc., and said that: “the intake had dwindled in recent years to below 80,000 a year.” A spokesman for Immigration Minister Ruddock corrected Bracks, saying that the intake at present was the highest for a decade at 105,000. Prime Minister Howard responded by refuting the aging population argument as a reason for increased

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immigration and warned Bracks about the consequences of attracting many more boatpeople should his do-gooder idea of establishing extra onshore asylum-seeker processing centers in Victoria be construed as a green light for more boats to head for Australia. Within days, the *Melbourne Herald Sun* of 10 December 2001 published the results of its voteline poll: “Should Victoria take the asylum seekers to boost our population?” The answer was a resounding “no,” from 96.7 percent on the same day that another big TV advertising campaign promoting multiculturalism was launched by Brack’s Victoria government. Their editorial and letters page follow-up condemning Brack’s stupidity were a joy to read.

To sum up, the forces driving the renewed push for increased immigration and multiculturalism demonstrate nothing but contempt for the majority conservative view

on these issues. How long can a society remain culturally, administratively, and politically cohesive when such a vast chasm separates such a large cadre of influential managerial elite from majority thinking on matters of such fundamental importance?

The newly re-elected Howard government should welcome the opportunity to again explore the necessity for a “national population policy” – as the pro-immigration forces have termed their new push. There has never been a better time – post-*Tampa*, post-September 11, and post- an election shadow-boxed on immigration and multiculturalism – to recognize, neutralize, and stabilize the problem now that it has the appropriately high profile with public opinion more skeptical than ever on immigration and multiculturalism. The *Australian* of 6 December 2001, in a story by Peter Saunders titled “A clumsy hand is no help, governments are no good at social policy,” says:

*Even multiculturalism reveals the same pattern. Thirty years ago opinion polls found substantial support for further immigration. But then the government abandoned its support for assimilation and integration in favour of multiculturalism... The government's commitment to multiculturalism has therefore ended up creating hostility and the result has been growing public opposition to further immigration.*

So the folks have given Howard another chance to solve their problem. Although there is welcome improvement they, too, must play a more active role in their own salvation than they have to date. And on the topic of a more active role, *The Social Contract* is read in print and online by many more intelligent people across the United States and the rest of the world than it can reach in Australia. If you'd like to encourage Prime Minister Howard and his government further and faster along the path to immigration and multiculturalism reform in this age of globalization and the Internet, why don't you (and your friends) drop him an email at [www.pm.gov.au](mailto:www.pm.gov.au) or fax 011-61-2-62734100 (or send a postcard to him at Parliament House, Canberra, ACT. 2600 Australia) in recognition of his efforts so far. Let him know his stand has been significant in world terms, that your communication to him is in itself evidence that he has more support around the world than he can know

for his mainstreaming of a usually taboo topic, and that a steady hand in the same direction will hopefully encourage leaders elsewhere to do what must be done.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Melbourne *Age*, 6 December 2001 “Egypt’s love-hate affair with bin Laden” by David Hirst.

2. Carney has been aware of my work for some years and interviewed me for some background before writing “Who is the real John Howard” and “Our Menzian leader” both of which are quoted herein. The Prime Minister is known to be an avid newspaper reader with the usual keen interest of a national leader to calibrate criticism and commentary aimed in his direction. My hope for Carney’s initial article was that it might stimulate some reflection. A well-placed source in Canberra informed me some days later that Carney’s piece was considered to be “fair comment” given the ceaselessly superficial and spiteful drivel usually served up about the prime minister on op-ed pages. I’ve met John Howard twice. The first time was 1 November 1990 when his career was still becalmed in the doldrums because of his sensible 1988 comments critical of Asian immigration levels and multiculturalism. On that occasion I gave him some AAFI (Australians Against Further Immigration) material to consider. The second time we met was on 5 May 1998, late at night, when leaving a Murdoch Press-sponsored big-business pro-big-immigration “Australia Unlimited” conference dinner that, as Prime Minister, he’d been invited to address. I felt obliged to pay dearly to attend the dinner, which turned into a worthwhile investment in the following manner: After renewing the acquaintance and briefly discussing his changed fortunes since last we’d met, I handed the Prime Minister a copy of *The Social Contract*, Volume VIII, Number 2, Winter 1997-98 with the theme “Australia’s identity crisis.” After a thorough and what appeared to be approving scan of the contents page, he commented that TSC looked like very interesting bedtime reading for that very night, gesturing that he had nothing else with him. I wished him happy reading and thanked him for his interest after which we shook hands and went our different ways into the night. Fast forward to late August 2001. I faxed to the Prime Minister’s office a copy of my TSC Volume V, Number 2, Winter 1994-95 review of Jean Raspail’s *The Camp of the Saints* five minutes after the first late night radio news report of the *Tampa* boatpeople heading for Australia. A day later I had a call from one of the Prime Minister’s senior advisors requesting a copy of *The Camp* by express delivery, which I subsequently dispatched. I understand a timely briefing note using the review and the book was prepared for Howard. Immigration Minister Phillip

Ruddock did much of the public heavy lifting on the *Tampa* issue for the Prime Minister in a competent fashion. Ruddock and I have been on first name terms for over ten years since he addressed an AAFI meeting in October 1990 at my invitation, where on his own admission he was received in a civil, cordial and informed manner. We have discussed interesting books together more than once. His office acquired for him a copy of Kevin Macdonald's *The Culture of Critique* (Praeger 1998), after I ran my finger down the contents page for him after a public meeting in Melbourne, October 2000. I last saw Ruddock on September 12, 2001, when I gave him a copy of *The Camp*. I gave Shaun Carney a copy on October 12.

3. "Faded a little" is to put it politely. Good taste precludes repeating what some of her erstwhile advisors, candidates, party officials, and supporters quietly mutter about their fallen idol these days, and over the last couple of years for that matter. For background, see TSC Volume VII, Number 2, Winter 96/97 page 101-103 'Being there: the Prime Minister and Pauline' in which I quote Howard's famous 1998 commentary on slowing Asian immigration and his blunt rejection of multiculturalism, and TSC Volume VIII, Number 2, Winter 97/98 in which several articles touch on Hanson. Her authorized biography *Pauline Hanson: The Hanson Phenomenon* by Helen Dodd, 1997, states in the introduction that: "...she can only thank the Australian media for making her the most recognized person in Australia, for giving her such a high profile, and creating the Hanson Phenomenon" (p vii), and in the epilogue, "...the media created the Hanson Phenomenon" (p 210). One off-the-record estimate I heard regarding the value of electronic and print media lavished on Hanson was two billion dollars in two years! Why? One of the more convincing explanations is that by anointing with celebrity status this previously unknown, unread, untutored, undisciplined, unpredictable, increasingly egocentric, and autocratic Pauline Hanson as the paragon of Australian nationalism, there was every chance that Howard's

conservative coalition would split, the conservative vote would be atomized, Howard would be gone, the left-leaning Labor Party would fall into government by default, and Hanson would disappear having shot both her feet off. Just that scenario nearly happened in 1998 when Howard squeaked back in with slightly less than a national majority vote spread across the right places – a la George W. Bush in 2000.

4. What Carney doesn't say in either of his articles quoted herein is that, although public opinion supported Howard for his comments in 1988, key leftish elements in his own center right party including today's Immigration Minister, Phillip Ruddock, crossed the floor against him, which led to

Howard's loss of the Liberal Party leadership and is why he chooses his grounds for a stand on immigration carefully today. Obviously Howard and Ruddock have both learned much since and have years ago patched up their differences. After all, it was primarily their closely coordinated efforts that held the government's collective backbone together through the *Tampa* episode. However, the Prime Minister's adversaries on immigration and multiculturalism within senior levels of his party and its big-business connections probably still constitute a greater threat to him than all the opposition parties put together. Snakes in the grass in your own backyard always pose the most immediate danger.

5. See *Melbourne Herald Sun*, 20 February 2001, "Climate of calamity" by Clare Nullus, reporting on findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "[In] Asia – high temperatures, drought, floods, and soil degradation will reduce food production in some areas. Rises in the sea level and more intense tropical cyclones will displace millions of people." The political trick will be in having this potential for catastrophe factored into the national public and administrative psyche as a constant for strategic planning and national security without the embarrassment and sensitivity that still inhibits discussion of these nightmare scenarios.

6. *The Australian*, 7 January 2000, "More ingredients stirred into melting pot" by John Kerin who quotes the doyen of demography in Australia, emeritus professor Charles Price, who has been tracking ethnic change in Australia for decades: "In 1947 the share of the population considered Anglo-Celtic was 90 percent. This had fallen to 74.5 percent by 1988, and to 70 percent by 1999. Projections for the future indicate that if recent immigration trends are maintained, the Anglo-Celtic share will fall to 62.2 percent in 2025. Between 1999 and 2025, the share of the population with some Middle Eastern and Asian background will grow from 9 to 19 percent." My conclusion is that Australia's founding Anglo-Celts, on Price's predictions, will fall from absolute majority status about 2050.