

## Voice of Shakthi Thursday 30 August 2001

The crisis involving the 438 refugees stranded outside [Australia](#) waters is steadily worsening. The Australia government continues to bar the Norwegian vessel carrying mainly Afghan, Pakistani and Sri Lanka refugees from entering Australia territory. The Australian government has given a number of interesting reasons for this decision. One is that allowing the vessel to enter Australia will turn the country into a "soft target" for people smugglers. Another reason is that the government is already spending enough money looking after thousands of refugees and additional refugees is a sever burden on its resources. Another reason is that [boat](#) people deprives those refugees who wish to enter Australia through legal channels of the opportunity to make their home here. A large segment of the Australian community agrees with these views. These people include not only Australians of European [ancestry](#) but also people with Asian origins, including, sadly many Sri Lankans.

As far as we are concerned those who promote globalisation as the only way ahead must also realise that it is a process that creates immense hardships for a large number of people in the world, especially in the Third World. It is also to be expected that the victims of globalisation will also seek refuge with those who profit from the process. And we cannot agree with the reasons given by Mr. Howard's government for dragging its feet on helping those who seek their help. We have no doubt that if there is a genuine desire to ease the plight of the refugees enough money can be found in Australia without great difficulty. If the refugees are quickly processed and released to the community or sent back in the case of those who do not qualify the question of limited resources and the issue of jumping the queue will also not be so pressing. But the real problem is that the Australia regime and to some extent, the Australian community is not so concerned about the plight of there refugees as about the implications of their entry into Australia for their lives and society. In their eyes the steady entry of people from the poorest areas of the Third World can only result in "unmanageable" and "undesirable" social and cultural changes which will further threaten Australia's position as an "Anglo-Celtic" enclave in the Asian region. This we believe is the main reason why there is such hostility towards and insecurity about refugees in this country, even when experts have repeatedly pointed out that the benefits of migration far outweighs its negative impacts. If some of the Zimbabwean farmers displaced by Robert Mugabe decide to enter Australia will Mr. Rudock maintain the same hard-line, we wonder?

Another thing that Australian community should remember is that the West, including Australia must also shoulder some of the responsibility for the plight of the refugees who now seek their help. It was the West which nurtured guerrilla groups in Afghanistan and dictators like Saddam Hussein and it was the West which later turned against them and imposed sanctions on these countries. The sanctions have hurt the Taleban or Saddam Hussein very little. In fact, they are doing very well. Many of the poorest countries in the Third World have also suffered from the exploitation of Western colonialism which destroyed its traditional social and economic structures making their future dependent on the vagaries of Western capitalist [enterprise](#). It is the poor and destitute in those countries that have suffered as a result of those sanctions. It is those people who are now filling the boats departing for Australia. By refusing them asylum what the Australia government is saying is that "we can create problems for you but once we have created them, they are your problems". The boat people

have brought home the truth that you cannot spread suffering without sharing some of the inconvenience.

Finally, a word to our Sri Lankan brethren who are also up in arms about the "refugee menace". Everybody in this country except the Aborigines are very recent arrivals in this land. And everybody who left his or her country of birth for whatever reason is a refugee of some sort. Simply because you entered Australia by filling forms and waiting in a queue does not make you a higher form of refugee than the suffering humanity aboard the leaking vessels. And jumping onto Phillip Ruddock's and John Howard's band wagon will only make you the worst kind of refugee - a refugee from humanity.