

Interviews

High school students discuss One Nation

Our reporters
30 July 1998

On July 24, thousands of Australian high school students boycotted classes to protest against Pauline Hanson's One Nation party. At the Sydney demonstration, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters interviewed a number of students, seeking their views on the right-wing party and the reasons for its emergence.

The mood was one of determination to fight racism, combined with excitement at participating in what was, for most, their first political demonstration. Generally, however, the level of political discussion was low.

Many expressed anger over the blanket media coverage provided to Hanson's party. Most felt that the demonstration provided the only means through which they could express their opposition.

Chin, 15, from North Sydney Girls High said: 'Pauline Hanson has been allowed have her say against migrants, Aborigines and single mothers. Now we are going to have our say.' Chin marched with her friend Amy, holding a placard saying 'Many Nations, One Country'. Amy said students at her school had immigrated to Australian from a wide range of countries.

Others denounced racism, yet tended to identify themselves with the national economy.

Dianne, 14, from Newtown High, said: 'I am here because I wanted to show that a lot of us are against her [Pauline Hanson] and against racism. Her views are bad for Australia, bad for tourism and the economy.' Dianne's friend Blair, also 14, added: 'I don't like the way Hanson is using wrong ideas. She is putting down youth, different cultures and single mothers.'

Some students spoke about growing unemployment, poverty and cuts to education and health. Esmae, 16, came from East Sydney Girls High, a school that caters for students with learning difficulties. She opposed

Hanson's racist immigration policy and disagreed with her call for youth curfews and the reintroduction of corporal punishment in the schools.

Esmae said the media and governments ignored young people. 'Yet we are the next generation that is going to be affected by what happens in politics. The politicians don't have a clue. Hanson is trying to do something but she has to realise that she is blaming and picking on the wrong people. The cutbacks to schools and hospitals have to be stopped. The rich are getting richer and something needs to be done.'

There was some appreciation of the fact that One Nation strives to divert feelings of economic insecurity in a right-wing direction.

Andrew, 15, from Sydney Boys High, said: 'Hanson represents the stupidity of Australia. She has 1940s views about immigration and tariffs, but things have changed. What she says is shallow, uneducated and can't be substantiated. People are supporting her because they are scared. Hanson seems to them to be doing something when all she is doing is picking on easy targets like immigrants and single mothers.'

Few of the students saw the established political parties -- Labor, Liberal, National or the Australian Democrats -- as an alternative to One Nation. Jacqui Thomas, 15, from Sydney Girls High, said: 'Labor and Liberal are the same; I never see them as any different. I don't think any of these parties have any answers to issues facing ordinary people. There should be proper support given to small farmers and others facing hardship.'

She and her friend Victoria Bolton, also 15 and from Sydney Girls High, carried a handwritten placard that said: 'Equality is essential'. When asked why people had voted for Hanson, Jacqui replied:

'One Nation gets support from rural communities who

are being badly done by. I come from a rural background and I know that it is really bad for them. The farmers think that if they support something different they will get what they need. Unfortunately with Hanson they will get a whole of policies that will not help them. Her policies appeal to the older generation, like my grandparents. They remember when Labor had these policies -- life seemed better, the policies seemed to work -- so they want to go back.'

We asked Jacqui to comment on the tendency for some students who want to fight Hanson's racist and nationalist organisation to say, at the same time, they are doing so to defend the nation. Was not nationalism the problem in the first place, we suggested.

'This really gets to the heart of the problem,' Jacqui responded. 'This has never been shown to us before. It's true that if you look at the world, nation states cause a lot of problems -- such as wars and other things. If you combined everything and had no nations, you could organise a decent situation for everybody. People are running around saying, this is my nation, this is your nation, but these attitudes are making things worse for everybody.'

Her comments, like those of other students, raise many issues that require further discussion.

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