

# Australian miner runs for right-wing One Nation party

**Our reporter**  
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The recent announcement by Darren Culley, a second-generation coal miner, that he will stand as a candidate for the right-wing One Nation Party in the upcoming national elections in Australia immediately raises the following question.

How has it happened that a worker is standing for a party whose platform is totally inimical to the interests of the working class, and whose second-in-command, David Oldfield, describes himself as a 'national socialist'-the banner of the Nazis in Germany in the 1930s?

Culley will run in the state of NSW for the seat of Hunter--right in the middle of the northern coalfields which have for decades been a bastion of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the mining unions.

The local Labor MP has publicly admitted that support for One Nation in the region is in the vicinity of 20 percent. Moreover, a recent national poll conducted by the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) of its members found that 13 percent intended to vote for One Nation.

Like other parties of the extreme right in Europe and the US, One Nation has sprung into prominence by exploiting the widespread alienation of voters from the major established parties--Labor, Liberal and National--and their deepfelt concerns over rising unemployment and deteriorating living standards.

The party won nearly a quarter of the vote in the recent Queensland state elections. Its leader Pauline Hanson postures as a 'rebel' against the established political order, promotes flagwaving Australian nationalism and blames Asian immigrants, Aborigines and welfare recipients for the lack of jobs and services.

Trying to explain the phenomenon, CFMEU national secretary John Sutton recently commented: 'Our members are really worried about job security and that runs with the One Nation line that people are getting screwed everywhere, which we all know is true.'

But Sutton fails to answer the obvious questions: in the first place, who is responsible for 'screwing' the people, and

second, why is One Nation, rather than Labor and the unions, benefiting from the growing anger at the loss of jobs and declining living standards?

The two issues are intimately connected. From 1983 until 1996 successive Labor governments held office. In tandem with the unions, they imposed a program of economic restructuring every bit as devastating as the policies carried out by Reagan in the US and Thatcher in Britain.

At 32 years of age, Culley would have been just 17 when the Hawke Labor government first came to power. For most of his working life he witnessed first hand the cruel betrayal of his concerns and hopes by the Labor Party and the trade unions.

In the coal mining industry, the ALP and the CFMEU insisted that miners in Australia had to be made 'competitive' with those around the world. The upshot has been that under various industry restructuring plans and enterprise bargaining agreements, one third of all coal mining jobs have been destroyed in the last 10 years. Companies can now force miners to work rosters around the clock, seven days a week. Safety standards have deteriorated badly.

Similar measures have been implemented in industry after industry with catastrophic results for the working class. In the Hunter Valley, unemployment stands at 9.8 percent and in the town of Cessnock, where Culley lives, is as high as 14 percent. Not only have jobs been destroyed but social services and public education slashed, and public hospitals shut down.

As far back as 1988, miners' frustrations with Labor's big business agenda compelled the Miners Federation (now a division of the CFMEU) to temporarily disaffiliate from the Labor Party. Since then, workers in the region have voted for so-called independents, for the Greens and Democrats, and even for the conservative Liberal and National parties, in an effort to pressure Labor to alter its course. But all these protests have been to no avail.

Culley embodies the hostility of hundreds of thousands of workers to Labor and the unions. 'I am a disenchanted miner who has had every right stolen from me,' he told a Sydney

newspaper.

But the emergence of support for One Nation among a section of miners and their families cannot be explained merely as the outcome of the betrayals of the Labor Party. After all, it is not the first time the working class has passed through such experiences.

In the 1930s Depression, the Laborites' implementation of the program of the employers and the banks saw an entirely different response. Broad sections of workers, especially in mining communities like the Hunter Valley, moved to the left and took up the fight for socialism as the answer to the crisis of the capitalist system.

Some joined the 'socialisation units' formed in the Labor Party to fight for 'socialism in our time' while others joined the Communist Party of Australia. The betrayal of the hopes and strivings of this generation, and the subsequent political experiences of the working class, provide a key to understanding the origins of the ideological confusion that has provided the basis for the growth of One Nation.

When tens of thousands of the most class conscious workers joined the Communist Party of Australia in the 1930s, believing it to represent the program of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, its programmatic axis had already been shifted. The perspective of socialist internationalism on which the Russian Revolution had been carried out had been replaced by Stalin's nationalist doctrine of 'socialism in one country', representing the political interests of the dominant Soviet bureaucracy.

'Socialism in one country' had its international corollary -- the so-called 'national road to socialism' under which the Communist Parties were to collaborate with their 'own' capitalist class. In World War II, the CPA actively worked with the Labor government to suppress all independent struggles of the working class as party officials in the mining and maritime unions joined government boards.

In the post-war boom, the perspective of socialism was undermined in two ways: internationally it was identified with the bureaucratic regime in the Soviet Union, while in Australia it was portrayed as representing a continuation of nationalist traditions. From the standpoint of the Stalinists, socialism would not be the outcome of an independent political movement of the working class, but would arise from the continuous extension of the regulation of the economy by the national government.

The high point of this program of class collaboration came during the 1980s -- the longest period of rule by a Labor government in history -- when the Stalinist union officials in the mining, maritime, metals and construction industries formed the chief props for the Labor government's prices and income Accord, under which all independent struggles for wages and conditions were suppressed.

However, towards the end of the 1980s a growing revolt began to develop. Amidst growing industrial action, the miners' disaffiliation from the Labor Party was followed by demands for similar action in other unions, as hostility grew to the Laborites program of 'restructuring' based on the destruction of jobs and working conditions.

But in 1989, the long-developing crisis of political perspective in the working class -- the lack of a broad-based socialist outlook -- came to a head with the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

In the absence of an independent outlook and historical understanding, the ideological campaign waged by the bourgeoisie -- that the breakdown of these regimes signified the end of socialism -- had a profound impact on the thinking of broad sections of workers. If the capitalist market had triumphed, then, it seemed, there was no alternative to the program of 'international competitiveness' being demanded by the employers and the Labor government and enforced by the trade union bureaucracy.

The rising militancy of the late 1980s, of which miners were a central component, collapsed in the face of far-reaching historical and political questions for which it had no answers.

The absence of a worked out program, based on an internationalist and anti-capitalist perspective, to fight the deepening attacks on social conditions has created the confusion that has enabled One Nation to strike roots amongst miners and other sections of the working class.

That confusion will only be dispelled to the extent that the most class conscious workers begin to make a critical examination of the experiences of the international workers' movement with the programs of Laborism and Stalinism. In other words, if the betrayals of previous generations of workers created the conditions for the political crisis which has now developed, an examination of that history can and must form the starting point of the struggle to resolve it.

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