

Australian state-funded networks provide platform for extreme-right

Richard Phillips
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Over the past year, the Australian media has begun extensively reporting on the activities of Reclaim Australia, the United Patriots Front, Rise Up Australia, the recently established Australian Liberty Alliance and other ultra-right formations.

Encouraged by Canberra's deepening military involvement in US-led interventions in the Middle East and hysterical claims, by Liberal-National Coalition and Labor governments alike, that Australia faces domestic terror attacks, the extreme right has stepped up its agitation against Muslims and asylum seekers.

Provocative and threatening anti-mosque protests and other demonstrations have been held denouncing Islam as a threat to "the Australian way of life" and demanding cuts in immigration numbers and the imposition of various anti-democratic measures.

While the promotion of these outfits has usually been the stock in trade of the tabloid press and radio shock jocks, the state-funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and its sister network, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), are now giving extensive coverage. Barely a week goes by without these networks providing information on the activities of one or another anti-Islamic hate group.

Last month, for example, the ABC reported on the founding conference of the Australian Liberty Alliance (ALA), which was officially registered with the Australian Electoral Commission in July and plans to run Senate candidates in next year's scheduled election.

Largely unknown until the ABC coverage, the ALA's conference was addressed by Geert Wilders, head of Holland's Party for Freedom and a notorious racist demagogue. Wilders specialises in whipping up backward layers of the population against immigrants and Muslims, claiming that the principal threat facing society is "Islamisation."

The ALA wants bans on all full-face religious coverings in public, a 10-year moratorium on resident visa applications by people from Islamic countries, and Australia's removal from the UN Refugees Convention. It also demands increased military spending and free-market austerity measures.

The ABC featured clips from Wilders' press conference and an interview with ALA president Debbie Robinson on its high-

rating "7.30" program. Not a single critical question or comment was directed toward Wilders or Robinson about their policies.

"7.30" journalist Lauren Day politely asked Robinson just one question: "Wilders has called Islam a retarded and barbaric culture, he's likened the Koran to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and he's called Muhammad a paedophile and a terrorist. Do you endorse those views?" Robinson replied that she did, and was not challenged.

Last Sunday, the ABC extensively covered national anti-Islam protests called by Reclaim Australia that sought to exploit widespread shock over the recent terror attacks in Paris. The ABC provided regular news feeds in the lead-up to and during Sunday's demonstrations.

On the same day, "Background Briefing" on the ABC's Radio National presented a 40-minute program entitled "Anti-Muslim extremists: how far will they go?" It included excerpts from violent race-hate speeches by various demagogues.

While the program voiced some concern about the growth of these groups, a number of those interviewed insisted that many in the far-right were just misunderstood individuals. These claims were never seriously scrutinized, nor was there any examination of the role played by the political establishment in creating the conditions that have encouraged the growth of such organisations.

"Background Briefing" did not make a single reference to Australia's involvement in the US-led "war on terror" or the increasingly provocative allegations by various federal and state parliamentarians that Islam was responsible for terrorism.

Rise Up Australia president and fundamentalist Christian Daniel Nalliah proclaimed the neo-fascist elements as "lovely Aussie boys who love their country." Listeners were given no information about Nalliah's own political history or views. He is rabidly anti-Islam, opposes homosexuality and abortion and declares Australia is "too tolerant."

Australian Federal Police counter-terrorism chief Neil Gaughan admitted that many involved in the far-right had "military backgrounds" but these were mainly just young men "looking for a purpose in life." Mark Textor, a Liberal Party strategist and campaign advisor for London's Tory mayor Boris Johnson and the Howard and Abbott governments, told

the program that Islamophobia was a “fantasy” and did not exist in Australia.

What is to account for the ABC’s widespread coverage of the far-right, and its barely-disguised efforts to legitimise these reactionary organisations?

The answer lies in the deepening political crisis facing Australia’s traditional establishment parties—Liberal, National and Labor—which confront mass hostility to their escalating assault on jobs and living standards, cuts in vital social programs and the ever-expanding spending on the military and war.

Fearing the eruption of popular opposition to this agenda, Australia’s political elite and its media mouthpieces are making concerted efforts to fashion new political mechanisms to defend its rule by whipping up divisions in the working class along racial and religious lines.

Incessant propaganda about the “war on terror” is being used to drown out all critical thinking about the never-ending military interventions, in order to condition the population for new and more disastrous wars.

This is in line with the militarism, patriotism and xenophobia underpinning Australia’s multi-million dollar World War I centenary celebrations. The ABC and SBS, in fact, have been Canberra’s principal outlets for centenary propaganda, broadcasting hours of material and glorifying, in particular, the “Anzac myth”—Australia’s and New Zealand’s military involvement in the disastrous April 25, 1915 British-led invasion of Turkey. The centenary events, according to Coalition and Labor prime ministers, provide the opportunity to inculcate the spirit of “national sacrifice” in Australian children.

Such was the barrage of war and militarism on Anzac Day, a national holiday, that SBS sports journalist Scott McIntyre was sacked after he tweeted his disgust at the wall-to-wall promotion of war, and challenged some of the official lies about Australian involvement in WWI and other imperialist wars.

SBS management dismissed McIntyre after the intervention of then communications minister, and now prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull (see: “Australian broadcaster sacks journalist for criticising Anzac Day”).

Media promotion of neo-fascistic, anti-Muslim groups is an international phenomenon. As German imperialism seeks to carve out a new place for itself on the world arena, its ruling elites, aided and abetted by the media, academia and sections of the middle class, are openly promoting extreme-right forces, anti-immigrant racists and apologists for Hitler’s Nazi regime.

Similar processes are underway elsewhere in Europe, which has seen the growth of France’s National Front, the Austrian Freedom Party, the United Kingdom Independence Party, the Party of Freedom in Holland and numerous anti-immigrant formations.

In the late 1990s, Australia’s political establishment and the

media toyed with such elements. Pauline Hanson, a right-wing xenophobe, was “discovered” and used to help prepare the political climate for the Howard Coalition government to deepen the social attacks on the working class carried out by the previous Hawke-Keating Labor governments.

The media gave extensive coverage to Hanson’s racist diatribes blaming Asian immigration, and the provision of social welfare to Aborigines and other oppressed minorities, for falling working-class living standards. The political establishment only denounced her views as “unacceptable” after her One Nation party won seats in the Queensland state parliament and began threatening the electoral base of the National Party, the Liberal government’s coalition partner. To preserve the two-party system, the ruling elite utilised the courts to shatter Hanson’s movement.

Today’s promotion of Australia’s ultra-right is occurring under much more explosive economic and social conditions than in the 1990s, when One Nation emerged.

Australia’s ruling establishment faces a geo-strategic dilemma. Canberra is politically tied to US imperialism and not just its military incursions in the Middle East but Washington’s “pivot” to Asia and its preparations for war against China. There is deep-seated anti-war sentiment that finds no expression in any section of the political establishment.

During elections and all other occasions, the ABC, SBS and other media outlets refuse to provide coverage of the Socialist Equality Party, whose fight to mobilise the international working class on a socialist program to abolish capitalism and the nation-state system is the only way to prevent imperialist war. The media attempts to justify this censorship, claiming to only have the time and the space for “mainstream” political parties.

However, no such censorship applies to Reclaim Australia, the ALA and other racist groups. The promotion of the extreme-right by the state-funded networks is a clear warning that Australia’s ruling elite is considering new, anti-democratic forms of rule in order to impose its agenda of war and a deepening assault on the social rights of the working class.



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