

Anti-Muslim rallies in Australia: A byproduct of the “war on terror”

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“Reclaim Australia,” a front for extreme right-wing and anti-immigrant groups, held demonstrations in all major Australian cities and a number of regional centres last Sunday. The organisers shamelessly exploited the terrorist atrocities in Paris to try to justify their demagogic and racist assertions that the Australian “way of life” is threatened by Islamic terrorism and the very presence of Muslims in the country.

Among the organisations involved were established nationalist parties such as One Nation, Rise Up Australia, the Australian Liberty Alliance and the still unregistered Freedom Party of Australia. Members of neo-fascist tendencies, such as the Australian Defence League (ADL) and the United Patriots Front (UPF), were also present. Australian flags intermingled with the French tricolour and American flags, and banners and placards denouncing Islam. Speakers called for the total banning of Muslim immigration to Australia and demanded that immigrants integrate and conform to “Christian” customs and values.

In the days leading up to Sunday’s rallies, the newspapers and television news were preoccupied with lurid coverage of the Paris atrocities and warnings by self-styled terrorism experts that Australian cities were at risk of similar attack. Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull yesterday gave the hysteria his sanction, declaring that a terrorist incident “was likely.”

The Reclaim Australia groupings collectively mobilised only a few thousand people across the entire country. In Sydney, barely 250 gathered for the rally at Martin Place, in the heart of the city centre. In Melbourne, some 500 protested in the outer suburb of Melton, voicing racist opposition to the construction of a mosque in the area. In Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth, no more than 200 attended each rally, and even fewer took part in smaller cities.

The mass media was nevertheless on hand to prominently report on both the protests and the “counter-protests” that were called at the same time and locations by “anti-racist” pseudo-left and anarchist tendencies in order to disrupt them.

Sunday’s protests had the character of a well-rehearsed political pantomime, staged for the benefit of the media and the police agencies. The police utilised the presence of the counter-protests to practice crowd-control deployments and techniques. Police officers moved throughout the demonstrations, recording the faces of all participants. In some cities, the “anti-racists” were able to drown out the right-wing rallies with loud music and chants. At most events, the rival groups were subjected to low-key “kettling”—being blocked into defined areas by police—and restricted to shouting insults at one another. A handful of people who attempted to break through the police lines were arrested.

Behind all the denunciations of Reclaim Australia as “fascist,” the purpose of the counter-protests is to cover up for the fact that the Labor Party, the trade unions and the Greens—the very organisations that the pseudo-left groups such as Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative promote as “left” or the “lesser evil” within official politics—share responsibility for the emergence of an extreme right-wing, racist movement.

The political climate in which Reclaim Australia developed is the unconditional support of successive Coalition and Labor governments for the fraudulent US “war on terror,” which provided the pretext for the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the current regime-change operations in Syria. For over 14 years, people have been saturated with nationalist and racists-tinted propaganda, insisting that they are directly threatened by Islamic-motivated terrorism. Australian

Muslims have been more or less demonised as an alien fifth column who spawn and harbour terrorists.

Highly-publicised police operations against alleged extremist plots have been used by the government and media to ramp up hysteria and justify sweeping attacks on fundamental civil liberties and unprecedented powers for the intelligence and police agencies. The supposed threat of terrorist infiltration is one of the pretexts for illegal bipartisan policy of “border protection,” in which refugees seeking to reach Australia by boat are denied their right to claim asylum and imprisoned in detention centres on remote Pacific islands.

The predictable outcome has been the growth of racism among the most disoriented and backward sections of the population. Fear of Muslim migrants has intersected with the long-standing efforts by right-wing demagogues and the trade unions to blame immigration for unemployment, housing costs and the crisis of social infrastructure. The drastic decline in working-class living standards and conditions is, in fact, the outcome of the policies of both Coalition and Greens-backed Labor governments.

The most pernicious factor in the growth of right-wing Australian nationalism has been the multi-million-dollar, government, corporate and media-sponsored commemorations of the centenary of World War I. Since early 2014, the population as a whole, but particularly young people, have been subjected to a campaign of militarist patriotism and historical lies about Australia’s participation in the imperialist slaughter and subsequent conflicts.

The Anzac Day celebrations on April 25 this year, 100 years after Australian troops invaded the Gallipoli peninsula in modern-day Turkey, was an obscene display of flag-waving, patriotic myth-making about the heroism of Australia’s military forces and mind-numbing rhetoric about the greatness of Australia’s “way of life.” It was consciously aimed at suppressing any critical or oppositional views to the real state of affairs—ever-widening social inequality and the dangers of a third world war—as was demonstrated, above all, by attempts to prevent the Socialist Equality Party from holding public meetings against the glorification of militarism.

The Greens, for all their pacifist posturing, were no less enthusiastic promoters of the Anzac myths as the

rest of the establishment.

In essence, the Reclaim Australia movement is the reactionary spawn of the “war on terror” and the stoking of nationalism by the Coalition, Labor and the Greens, the media and the entire ruling class. Extreme right-wing views are being encouraged at the level of official politics and advertised by the corporate-owned media and the state-controlled Australian Broadcasting Corporation and Special Broadcasting Service.

The official motivation for the fomenting of anti-Muslim xenophobia and Australian patriotism is the fear in the ruling elite of the social discontent and alienation among millions of workers and youth. It is a conscious effort to build a base of support for militarism and austerity on a racist and nationalist basis, and divide and weaken the working class. While Muslims are the current target of the xenophobic campaign, there are already signals that the right-wing groupings also will be used to advance virulent anti-Chinese chauvinism as Australia’s alliance with the United States draws it ever closer to war with China.

The critical issue in the struggle against right-wing nationalism is the development of an internationalist and socialist movement of the working class, against the Labor Party and the trade unions and their pseudo-left apologists, advancing a socialist answer to the threat of war and the social crisis that faces masses of people. A political struggle against capitalism and nation-state divisions—the cause of war, exploitation and inequality—is the essential precondition for the unification of the working class of all backgrounds.



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