

Australian political establishment embraces Pauline Hanson's One Nation

Mike Head**16 September 2016**

The Turnbull government and the political and media elite as a whole are consciously exploiting the anti-immigrant One Nation party of Pauline Hanson to try to channel seething working class discontent in xenophobic and militarist directions.

That is clear from the response to Hanson's first speech in the Senate this week, after she and three other One Nation candidates secured seats in the July 2 double dissolution election. Employment Minister Michaelia Cash effusively hugged Hanson on the Senate floor after her speech, a gesture that was symbolic of the wider embrace of Hanson's return to parliament.

Hanson's address, which was given wall-to-wall media coverage, focused on vilifying Muslims, China and welfare recipients, and blaming them for the job destruction, poverty and deteriorating social conditions inflicted on millions of people by successive governments, both Liberal-National Coalition and Labor.

Foreign Minister Julie Bishop said Hanson had "rightly taken her seat in the Senate" and was entitled to her views. Former Prime Minister John Howard declared that she was "entitled to be treated in a respectful fashion by the rest of the parliament." Government backbencher George Christensen told parliament he too was concerned about "the rise of Islamism in this country and those who are willing to commit violence in the name of that ideology."

Labor and Greens leaders only criticised Hanson for being "divisive." The Greens staged a theatrical walkout during her speech. They are just as responsible as the rest of the parliamentary establishment for enforcing the ever-greater inequality and social misery that enabled Hanson's outfit to profit from the political disaffection that saw a quarter of voters reject the three main establishment parties on July 2.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull offered no comment, except to say he disagreed with Hanson on the benefits of

migration. Significantly, Turnbull asked for a meeting with Hanson after the election, during which she accepted his offer of access to ministers and government staff for information to help One Nation "make the right decisions" on behalf of her supporters and constituents. "He was very gracious and opened with congratulations on my win, which I appreciated," Hanson said.

The advice that Hanson has received since then was undoubtedly reflected in her half-hour speech. She declared that the country was "in danger of being swamped by Muslims," dominated by "sharia law" and overcome by terrorist violence. It was also being taken over by the "oppressive communist" Chinese government via land and asset purchases, the kind of "foreign takeover" that Australians had fought and died in wars to prevent. At the same time, "welfare handouts" and "rorting" of the public health and education systems were crippling Australia.

Hanson called for a ban on "Muslim immigration" and wearing burqas, and the monitoring of mosques, combined with the cutting of welfare to young unemployed workers and single mothers. She advocated the introduction of an "Australian identity card," with "an identification chip, a photo and electronic fingerprint" to access government services.

Her diatribes feed directly into the underlying agenda being pursued by the corporate and political elite. This includes whipping up anti-Muslim fear-mongering as a means of justifying escalating involvement in the US-led wars in the Middle East and the ongoing overturning of basic legal and democratic rights, both in the name of the fraudulent "war on terror." It also features fomenting an anti-China witch-hunt as a means of overcoming popular opposition to Australia taking a frontline role in US plans for war with China.

Hanson's denunciations of single parents and jobless youth as "thieves" collecting "thousands of dollars a

week” boosts the bipartisan Coalition-Labor austerity agenda of slashing social spending to meet the demands of the financial markets for the gutting of welfare, the imposition of lower wages and the cutting of corporate taxes. Her proposals for an ID card dovetails with the constant bolstering of the surveillance and other powers of the police-intelligence-military apparatus.

The demonization of Muslims, Chinese people and welfare recipients seeks to divide the working class along ethnic and communal lines, and pit Australian workers against their fellow workers globally. Above all, One Nation’s pitch aims to divert workers and youth from turning toward a socialist perspective to unite the working class against the private profit system, which is the source of austerity and the lurch toward war.

Hanson spoke of growing unemployment queues, schools bursting at the seams, patients waiting longer for life-saving operations, housing costs soaring, city roads becoming clogged and the aged and the sick left to fend for themselves, or rely on charities. By feigning sympathy for “ordinary Australians” facing this economic and social devastation, One Nation picked up much of its 4.5 percent national vote in the most destitute regions, especially in Hanson’s home state of Queensland, where mining-related job losses have helped create areas of deep poverty.

By posturing as an anti-establishment party, One Nation is playing a vital diversionary role for the corporate and political elites that Hanson claims to oppose. They live in fear of a politically independent movement of the working class against the entire capitalist set-up.

Similar processes are underway in the US and Europe, with fascistic demagogues like Donald Trump, France’s Marin Le Pen and Britain’s UKIP leaders feeding off the discontent produced by decades of social reversal enforced by conservative and social democratic governments alike. In every case, the primary political responsibility for the emergence of these extreme right-wing nationalist elements rests with the labour and trade union apparatuses, and their supporters, that have long suppressed the struggles of workers.

Amid the blanket media coverage of Hanson’s remarks, comparisons were made to her inaugural parliamentary speech, in 1996, during which she railed against “Asians” who were “swamping” Australia, Aboriginal people and the welfare system.

Hanson won a seat in 1996 by capitalising on the landslide defeat of the Hawke and Keating-led Labor government of 1983–1996, which ruthlessly enforced the

restructuring of the economy in the interests of global capital, working hand-in-glove with business and the trade unions via Labor’s prices and incomes Accords.

Then too, Hanson preyed upon the resulting social insecurities and distress, channelling these sentiments in a reactionary and nationalist direction to blame immigrants, Aborigines and welfare recipients for unemployment and poverty.

Taking up where Hawke and Keating left off, Howard’s incoming Coalition government, together with the corporate chiefs and media proprietors found in Hanson a convenient vehicle for shifting official politics even further to the right. Both the Coalition and Labor adopted much of One Nation’s agenda—escalating the persecution of refugees, forcing welfare recipients into low-paid work and boosting police powers.

Two years later, when One Nation threatened to destabilise the two-party parliamentary order, the media suddenly turned on it, pointing to its connections with ultra-right wing and neo-Nazi outfits. After a filthy campaign orchestrated by elements within the Liberal Party—including future Prime Minister Abbott—Hanson was sentenced to three years’ jail on trumped-up charges under Queensland’s reactionary electoral laws. That political frame-up was only overturned on appeal three months later.

Today, Hanson’s embrace once more by the political powers-that-be was underscored by a well-publicised meeting she held with Abbott. In a video posted on Hanson’s Facebook page, Abbott said: “Pauline, it’s good to catch up with you again after all these years.” Hanson responded: “Yeah I think it is great too. I really appreciate you coming to my office and saying hello and welcoming me to the parliament.”

In other words, under conditions of an even deeper social and political crisis, the ruling elite once again has a use for Hanson’s right-wing nationalism, as long as it can be utilised to implement the corporate assault on the working class. Her comeback, and the rise of other right-wing populists in the Senate, is a warning to workers and youth of the need to build a new socialist leadership in the working class.



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