

# Pauline Hanson launches bids to join Australia's political establishment

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23 December 2016

While continuing to posture as an “anti-elite” party, Pauline Hanson’s anti-immigrant One Nation is making a definite pitch to become a pivotal part of the Australian parliamentary establishment.

Buoyed by Donald Trump’s victory in the US presidential election, Hanson is seeking to channel intense popular discontent, produced by decades of pro-market economic restructuring and widening social inequality, in reactionary nationalist directions.

This month, Hanson launched a bid to win enough seats in Queensland, her home state, to be included in a coalition government with either the Liberal National Party or the Labor Party. She also foreshadowed plans to try to do the same in other states, notably Western Australia, Tasmania and New South Wales.

“People are just really fed up with the major parties and screaming out for change,” Hanson told the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, a Murdoch tabloid that has given her continuous publicity for months. “I think there’s a move on across the country for One Nation ... People know I care about the country and the people are sick of career politicians.”

Like the billionaire Trump, however, One Nation’s claims to oppose the pauperisation and political disenfranchisement of entire layers of the population are a total fraud. Far from having any solution for the mounting social problems facing working people, these right-wing outfits fully support the underlying corporate profit system.

While railing against the banks for driving small businesses and farmers into destitution, Hanson’s entire political program is in fact directed to supporting the demands of big business—including for the decimation of working class conditions—while blaming immigrants, foreigners, welfare recipients and, in particular, “the Chinese” for the social devastation.

Just weeks ago, One Nation won effusive praise from Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull for assisting his government to push through legislation that will only intensify the hardship being experienced by millions of working class people.

This included about \$20 billion in social spending cuts targeting the poorest and most vulnerable people, more income tax cuts for the wealthy and the re-establishment of a policing agency, the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) with draconian powers to suppress resistance by workers throughout the construction and related industries.

Among other bills passed with One Nation’s support in the final parliamentary week of 2016 was legislation to authorise the Australian military to kill civilians in the Middle East, under the cover of targeting “terrorist supporters,” without fear of prosecution for war crimes. This marks a further stepping-up of the Australian ruling elite’s protracted frontline involvement in the criminal US-led wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria for domination over the resource-rich region.

At a joint media conference on December 1, Turnbull and Joyce paid tribute to One Nation and other right-wing populists in the Senate, as well as the Greens, who provided the unstable Liberal-National Coalition with the votes it desperately needed to pass the bills.

With Hanson’s help, Turnbull, a multi-millionaire ex-merchant banker, could even claim to have had a series of political victories that proved his government could deliver the “national economic reform plan” and budget-slashing demanded by the global credit ratings agencies and financial markets.

“I want to thank Richard Di Natale and the Greens for their support and also the continuing support in the Senate, of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation, and of course the Nick Xenophon Team,” Turnbull said. “So right across the board, whether it is national security, economic reform, industrial reform or ... important tax reform, we’re getting on and getting the job done.”

Turnbull’s praise for Hanson took to a new level the efforts of the political and media elite to promote Hanson’s party as a means of diverting seething working class discontent. That effort was symbolised in September when Hanson gave her first speech in the Senate 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.

In her speech, Hanson claimed that Australia was being taken over by the “oppressive communist” Chinese government via land and asset purchases. At the same time, “welfare handouts” and “robbing” of the public health and education systems were “crippling” the country.

Such tirades feed directly into the corporate agenda. This includes whipping up anti-Muslim prejudice to justify the US-led wars in the Middle East and the overturning of basic legal and democratic rights. It also features fomenting anti-Chinese witch-hunts as a means of overcoming popular opposition to US plans for war with China.

Hanson is being embraced by sections of business. On December 6, millionaire entrepreneur Dick Smith said he would back One Nation in a push to woo voters in western Sydney—a region of high working class unemployment—trying to mimic the way Trump preyed upon the deep disaffection in “rust belt” states of America.

Smith, who was the Hawke Labor government’s “Australian of the Year” in 1986, told the Murdoch newspaper he had held talks with Hanson and agreed with her views on drastically cutting the number of immigrants.

With considerable media fanfare, Hanson announced last Sunday that One Nation would field candidates in at least 36 seats in the next Queensland election, seeking to outperform its 1998 election result, in which 11 One Nation MPs were elected to the state parliament. The seats being targeted include some of the state’s worst areas of unemployment and poverty, such as in western and southern Brisbane and the Lockyer Valley, to the west of the state capital.

Significantly, one of Hanson’s candidates, Taiwanese born Shan Ju Lin, told the media that despite Hanson’s infamous remark 20 years ago that Australia was “being swamped by Asians,” One Nation could now get the votes of “good Asians” by opposing China. “I feel the Chinese Communist Party is a great threat to Australia because they bought a lot of businesses and our harbours and properties,” she said. “They will take over power of Australia.”

A recent Galaxy poll put One Nation’s support at 16 percent. It won 22 percent of the vote in 1998, when Hanson first emerged. Hanson originally won a House of Representatives seat in outer-western Brisbane in 1996 by profiting from the landslide defeat of the Hawke and Keating-led Labor governments of 1983–1996. Labor had ruthlessly enforced the restructuring of the economy in the interests of global capital, working hand-in-glove with the trade unions.

One Nation was used by the Howard Coalition government, and the corporate elite and media proprietors,

to shift official politics even further to the right. They promoted Hanson’s bigoted views, and both major parties adopted much of One Nation’s program—escalating the persecution of refugees, forcing welfare recipients into low-paid work and boosting police powers.

In mid-1998, One Nation attracted nearly 25 percent of the vote in the Queensland election and threatened to destabilise the two-party parliamentary order. The Howard government and the media suddenly turned on it, pointing to its connections with ultra-right wing outfits, and its anti-democratic organisational structure.

Similar machinations could emerge again. This month, Hanson sought to underscore her new cooperative orientation by disowning one of her colleagues, Senator Rodney Culleton, an agitator against banking abuses. He faces possible disqualification from the Senate because of bankruptcy proceedings against him and a previous criminal conviction.

One Nation then sacked one of its Queensland state candidates after media reports that he had sent homophobic tweets in the past. According to Hanson, all One Nation candidates will now be subjected to national police checks.

Whether or not Hanson is fully accepted into the political fold, the demonisation 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.

Similar processes are underway in the US and Europe, with demagogues such as Trump, France’s Marine Le Pen and Britain’s UKIP leaders preying on the discontent produced by decades of social reversal. The primary political responsibility for the emergence of these right-wing nationalist elements rests with the labour and trade union apparatuses, and their supporters, that have long suppressed the struggles of workers.

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.



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