

Pauline Hanson's One Nation seeks power in Australian states

Mike Head
2 February 2017

Buoyed by US President Donald Trump's election, Pauline Hanson's anti-immigrant One Nation party has declared its intention to take government, or at least win the parliamentary "balance of power," in a number of Australian states, notably Western Australia (WA) and Hanson's home state of Queensland. The first test of Hanson's ambition will come in the WA state election on March 11, followed by an election due in Queensland by early next year.

Last November, amid a glare of media coverage, Hanson greeted Trump's victory by popping bottles of champagne on the Parliament House lawn in Canberra with other One Nation senators. "Why I'm celebrating is that I can see that people ... around the world are saying, we've had enough of the establishment," she said. "I can see in Donald Trump a lot of me and what I stand for in Australia."

Hanson solicited, via contacts in Trump's team, an invitation for one of her Senate colleagues to attend Trump's inauguration. She tweeted: "Would you believe it? ... what an honour!" The invitation was delivered via the office of US Republican congressman Adam Kinzinger, who contacted Darren Nelson, an economist who once worked for Trump and now advises One Nation Senator Malcolm Roberts.

An avid climate science denier, Roberts was himself in Washington during December, attending a conference of some of the world's most notorious anti-climate science figures. He posed for photographs with Myron Ebell, of the oil industry-backed Competitive Enterprise Institute, who was picked by Trump to lead his Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) "transition team." Trump's administration is stripping powers from the EPA, thus boosting the profits of the energy conglomerates.

Increasingly, Hanson is hailing Trump's policies as

the basis for One Nation extending its power base from having three or four senators in federal parliament to holding office, initially at state level, possibly in coalitions with Liberal-National or Labor-led governments. This week, she praised Trump's refugee and immigration bans, accusing Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of being "too weak" to make such "tough decisions."

Emulating Trump, Hanson whipped up fears of Islamic terrorism, calling for a total ban on Islamic immigration. "The people of America have elected Donald Trump because they wanted to regain control of their borders and protect themselves against the influence and threat of radical Islamic terrorism," she declared.

Hanson is cynically exploiting the widespread political disaffection with the establishment parties—Labor, Liberal-National and the Greens—which are responsible for making deep inroads into the living standards of working people. She is seeking to divert this hostility in reactionary nationalist and anti-immigrant directions, blaming refugees, "Asians," "Muslims," "foreign workers" and "free trade" for the social devastation caused by the profit system.

In states like Queensland and WA, the discontent has been intensified by the collapse of the mining boom that once generated jobs in mining projects and resources-related industries. There are now mining "ghost towns" and regions mired in recession. This has aggravated the social crisis caused by years of manufacturing closures and public sector cuts.

WA was the site of the country's biggest iron ore mines, once responsible for a substantial portion of the state's tax revenues. Large liquefied natural gas (LNG) construction projects have been completed, ending the employment of thousands of construction workers, or

put on hold. By the middle of 2016, the value of projects underway was only \$1.6 billion, well below the \$50 billion three years earlier.

Even by understated official figures, WA's unemployment rate is near 7 percent, one of the worst in the country. The rate is 24 percent around the northern Perth suburbs of Balga, Mirrabooka and Girrawheen, and 21 percent in central Mandurah, about 70 kilometres south of Perth. Other areas in or near Perth have rates above 10 percent, including Gosnells, Maddington, Hamilton Hill, Rockingham and Midland.

These are among the areas targeted by One Nation, which claims to have support as high as 30 percent in some pockets of the state. Hanson claims that One Nation will run 60 candidates in the state election. An opinion poll published in the *West Australian* last month put One Nation's overall vote at 11 percent. That would be enough to win seats in the state parliament, giving it the capacity to hold the so-called balance of power—that is, to form a majority by blocking either with Labor or the Liberal and National parties.

Hanson's campaign in WA is an eclectic grab bag. She has professed to oppose the destruction of jobs, and the planned privatisation of the state's electricity grid, while calling for unspecified further cuts to government spending. At the same time, she has sought to foment divisive, anti-Muslim sentiment by calling for a ban on women wearing a burqa.

For electoral purposes, Hanson has taken up various causes: more treatment for PTSD-suffering military veterans, legalisation of medicinal cannabis, more Australian-made products in supermarkets, a crackdown on politicians' entitlements, and protection of the taxi industry against ride-sharing service Uber.

While claiming to champion the downtrodden, her program serves the interests of the corporate elite, particularly national-based business, and sets sections of the working class against each other along ethnic and communal lines. As well as “zero-net immigration,” One Nation demands the imposition of tariffs on imports, in order to “protect our manufacturing from further decline, closure or going offshore.” Its climate change denying dovetails with the interests of the energy companies.

Hanson first emerged in the late 1990s, denouncing Asians, Aborigines and welfare recipients, blaming

them for the worsening conditions facing working people after 13 years of Labor government under Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. When One Nation won nearly a quarter of the vote in a 1998 Queensland state election—throwing official politics into turmoil—the media and political establishment launched a campaign to discredit and break apart the party, and ultimately railroad Hanson to prison in 2003 on trumped-up electoral registration charges.

Today, while still depicting herself as an “anti-elite” political outsider—adopting Trump's slogan of “drain the swamp”—Hanson is making a clear pitch to join the political establishment.

Speaking last month in Perth, Hanson said: “The rise of One Nation in 1996 was unprecedented to the extent the major political parties had to get rid of me... Back 20 years ago it was ‘we were too much of a right-wing party’ and I think that tag has been lost from One Nation.

“We have gained more credibility because we have put up more policies. Even the leaders like [WA Premier] Colin Barnett and [Prime Minister] Malcolm Turnbull say we have more centre policies. The thing is, my policies have not changed over the years they have just been reported differently.”

These comments underline the degree to which the entire political establishment has shifted sharply to the right. In the 1990s, the Howard Coalition government adopted key planks of Hanson's program, particularly her anti-refugee and anti-welfare policies, before it orchestrated the frame-up against her. Now, sections of the political, media and corporate elite are actively promoting Hanson to divert even greater political disaffection. In WA, the Liberals and Labor, who both once ruled out giving her second preference votes, are negotiating preference-swapping deals with One Nation in bids to scrape back into office.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)