

Australian Greens put forward nationalist trap for anti-Trump sentiment

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Over the past week, the actions of Donald Trump's administration—including the ban on citizens from seven Muslim-majority countries entering the US, a halt to refugee processing and other sweeping immigration restrictions—have provoked widespread opposition from workers, students and young people, including in Australia.

The progressive sentiments animating those joining demonstrations around the world stand in sharp contrast to the statements of establishment politicians across Europe and Australia, criticising Trump's measures.

Political figures who are implicated in militarist policies that have created the worst refugee crisis since World War II, and the erosion of civil liberties under the rubric of “border protection” and the “war on terror,” have professed concern for democratic norms and international law. At the same time, amid a fracturing of the world economy and a rise of economic nationalism, others have responded to Trump's inauguration by advocating a more aggressive promotion of the “national interests” of their own ruling elite.

This week, Greens leader Richard Di Natale called on the Liberal-National government of Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to replicate the self-serving statements of German President Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande and other European leaders. He said Turnbull should instruct the foreign minister “to pick up the phone and express Australia's opposition to what Donald Trump is doing right now.”

Di Natale said Australia needed to “junk the US alliance.” A statement on the Greens web site, entitled “reject Trump,” declared that the US president's “time in office so far could easily be confused for that of a fascist dictator.”

Labor leader Bill Shorten also made a Facebook post, insisting he was “appalled” by Trump's immigration ban.

The posture of moral outrage from both quarters can only be described as an exercise in staggering hypocrisy.

The attacks on refugees by successive Liberal-National and Labor governments have led to Australia becoming a model for draconian “border protection” policies around the

world. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton responded to Trump's executive order by gloating: “Really the rest of the world is catching up to Australia now. We are the envy of the world when it comes to strong border protection policies that protect the integrity of our immigration system.”

Labor governments, supported by the Greens, have spearheaded the assault on asylum seekers. Between 2010 and 2013, the Greens were in a de facto coalition with Julia Gillard's Labor government, which maintained the detention camps for refugees reopened by the previous Rudd Labor government on Manus Island and Nauru in the Pacific. It expanded the persecution of asylum seekers, including by repatriating refugees to Sri Lanka where they faced government repression, and forging a refugee “people swap” with the autocratic Malaysian government, which was blocked by the High Court on the grounds that it could contravene domestic and international law.

While they claimed to oppose aspects of the Gillard government's refugee agenda, the Greens made clear that the oppression of asylum seekers was not an obstacle to their alliance with the Labor government, and they would not move to threaten its budgetary supply.

Today, amid widespread shock and anger over the Trump administration's actions, Di Natale and the Greens are cynically trying to channel opposition into Australian nationalism, tinged with anti-Americanism. Di Natale's agenda was underscored by remarks on Sky News. He declared that Australia could no longer be the “lapdog” of the US. In the *Australian*, he called for a “new relationship with the US that advances our interests.”

The Greens are articulating the fears of sections of the ruling elite that Trump's bellicose foreign policy and disregard for diplomatic norms poses a threat to the prosecution of Australian imperialism's own predatory interests. Di Natale's call for Australia to “renegotiate the terms of a new alliance,” and even to “junk the US alliance” echoes statements by prominent establishment figures, including Bob Carr, a former New South Wales premier and federal foreign minister, and Paul Keating, a former Labor

prime minister.

Di Natale's criticisms of the US alliance are not motivated by opposition to the wars and intrigues of American imperialism. The Greens-backed Gillard Labor government aligned Australia with the US "pivot to Asia," an aggressive military build-up in the Asia-Pacific region in preparation for war against China. After US President Barack Obama announced the new policy from the floor of the Australian parliament in 2011, then-Greens leader Bob Brown and prominent MP Adam Bandt were among the first to warmly greet him.

Since then, the Greens have maintained the conspiracy of silence of the entire political establishment and the corporate press surrounding Australia's frontline role in plans for a catastrophic military conflict in the Asia-Pacific. The Greens have also lent support to the US-led regime-change operations in Libya and Syria, which have deepened the catastrophe in North Africa and the Middle East, and forced millions to flee their homes.

Throughout Obama's presidency, the Greens said virtually nothing about his administration's endless drone wars, extrajudicial killings and expansion of the powers of the military-intelligence apparatus. They continued to favourably cite his empty professions of concern over climate change.

The Greens fear that by backing the even more belligerent agenda of the Trump administration, Australian imperialism will become embroiled in new military adventures and wars that will divert it from advancing the ruling elite's interests in Asia and the South Pacific. In 2003, the Greens advanced tactical criticisms of Australian involvement in the criminal US invasion of Iraq. Bob Brown declared that troops should instead be deployed to the South Pacific, in order to protect Australian imperialism's "arc of stability" and prevent other powers, such as China, from developing greater influence.

While Di Natale has thus far avoided spelling out the logic of his position, other proponents of an "independent" foreign policy have made clear it would inevitably entail a vast expansion of military spending and the armed forces.

At the same time, Di Natale and the Greens are seeking to divert hostility to Trump, reflected in protests being held across Australia, behind the official parliamentary set-up. They are fearful that widespread anger over the policies of the new US administration will intersect with the unprecedented disaffection among millions of workers and young people over the destruction of healthcare and education, mounting social inequality, the assault on democratic rights and the growth of militarism.

Tensions between rival groupings within the Greens have centred on how to prevent the party from being bypassed by a developing political radicalisation.

Greens Senator Lee Rhiannon, and the party's new Left

Renewal faction, have urged the party to make a populist appeal, with anti-capitalist rhetoric. They have invoked the model of Bernie Sanders, who won 13 million votes in the Democratic Party primaries by falsely claiming to be a socialist and an opponent of the "billionaire" class. Sanders then urged his supporters to back Hillary Clinton, the favoured candidate of big business and the military.

Sanders's record, which now includes statements that he would be "delighted" to work with Trump in implementing protectionist measures, shows that what the Greens are calling for is a political trap to prevent any independent movement of the working class against the existing political set-up.

Di Natale has sharply clashed with Left Renewal and Rhiannon. In denouncing Trump, however, he has criticised "crony capitalism." Like Rhiannon, Di Natale—who campaigned in the last election for a Labor-Greens coalition government committed to implementing austerity—is concerned by growing anti-capitalist views.

The progressive sentiments of those participating in the protests against Trump's immigration ban can go forward only on the basis of a genuine socialist perspective, in opposition to all the parties of the capitalist political establishment, including the Greens.

Trump's policies, which represent a qualitative escalation of the reactionary policies implemented by previous Democratic and Republican administrations, are the sharpest expression of a turn toward repression, war and social austerity by governments around the world, amid the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s. The alternative is the fight for the unification of the international working class in defence of fundamental social rights, including for workers to live and work where they choose, with full citizenship rights.



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