

Right-wing Australian senator stages anti-Muslim “stunt” in federal parliament

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In a gratuitous anti-Muslim “stunt” that provoked widespread public revulsion, Pauline Hanson, leader of the xenophobic One Nation party, wore a burka during question time in the Australian Senate on Thursday.

Hanson’s donning of the full-length Islamic covering was the crudest expression of a protracted campaign, spearheaded by the major political parties, to demonise Muslims, as part of a broader effort to whip-up nationalism and jingoistic backwardness.

In the Senate, Hanson reiterated her party’s call for the burka to be banned. She repeated her unsubstantiated claims that the veil was a “security threat” and attempted to link the garment to terrorism.

Underscoring the transparently racist character of One Nation’s anti-Muslim agitation, Hanson told Sky News the burka endangered “social cohesion” and was “confronting” and “un-Australian.”

No less obscene than Hanson’s actions was the response of prominent representatives of the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party.

Political figures who have witch-hunted Muslims, refugees and other oppressed sections of the working class—in order to legitimise Australia’s participation in US-led wars in the Middle-East, justify the erosion of basic democratic rights, and divert attention from the social crisis caused by their pro-business policies—adopted a hypocritical posture of moral outrage.

Leading the way was Attorney-General George Brandis, who decried Hanson’s actions as “appalling.” Outlining his real concerns, Brandis told the Senate that as attorney-general, intelligence and police officials had told him “it is vital for their intelligence and law-enforcement work that they work cooperatively with the Muslim community.”

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull echoed Brandis’s

comments at a media conference on Friday. “Our best allies, our indispensable allies in the battle against Islamist extremism, against Islamist terrorism, is the Muslim community,” Turnbull stated.

Standing alongside Turnbull was the director-general of security, Duncan Lewis, an ex-military officer who commands the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). “[T]he association we have with the broader Muslim community, is central to our business,” Lewis said.

In other words, the government’s main fear is that by crudely demonstrating the anti-Muslim sentiment promoted by the entire political establishment, Hanson is jeopardising the operations conducted by successive governments to cultivate a network of “community leaders,” police informants and undercover agents to monitor, harass and persecute workers and young people of the Islamic faith.

Hanson’s stunt also threatens to create difficulties for the government’s collaboration with Muslim-majority states, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, in the US-led predatory wars in the Middle-East, including the illegal bombing campaign against Syria.

Brandis’s comments in the Senate were universally hailed by his nominal political opponents. Labor and Greens senators responded with a standing ovation.

Labor Senator Penny Wong “congratulated” Brandis. Greens leader Richard Di Natale told the attorney-general: “On behalf of the Australian Greens, I want to thank you for showing leadership in this chamber.”

The absurdity of these congratulations is made plain by that fact that three years ago, Brandis declared in the Senate that “people do have a right to be bigots,” during debates on racial discrimination legislation.

Those comments in 2014 were part of an ongoing promotion of racism and backwardness by the

government, especially directed against Muslims, which is aimed at cultivating a right-wing base of support to offset its deepening political crisis.

More broadly, for more than 15 years, Labor and Liberal-National governments alike have used the bogus “war on terror” as the pretext for participating in criminal wars in the Middle East, and eviscerating fundamental civil liberties.

The same Coalition and Labor politicians who feigned outrage at Hanson’s actions are responsible for such crimes as the 16-year occupation of Afghanistan and the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was based on lies and resulted in the deaths of up to a million civilians.

Labor and Coalition governments also have pushed through raft after raft of “anti-terror” laws. These have handed the police and the authorities powers to carry out raids and detentions without charge, abrogate the rights to assembly and protest, and spy on virtually all communications.

This has been accompanied by continuous scare campaigns waged by the major parties in collaboration with the gutter press over the alleged dangers posed by “Islamic extremism.” These campaigns have amounted to the demonisation of the entire Muslim population.

At the same time, the policies of Labor and the Coalition have transformed Australia into a world model for governments seeking to persecute refugees and prevent them from exercising their right to seek asylum. Immigration Minister Peter Dutton last year summed up the filth accompanying this policy. He slandered refugees as “illiterate” and “innumerate,” claiming they would “languish” on unemployment benefits and “steal” “Australian jobs.”

While the Greens claim to oppose aspects of this agenda, Di Natale’s fawning response to Brandis underscores their support for the entire framework of “national security.” The Greens have enabled the passage of key aspects of the “anti-terror” legislation, and propped up the 2010-2013 Gillard Labor government as it expanded the powers of the police, deepened Australian involvement in US-led wars and ramped-up the persecution of refugees.

Another aspect of the glaring hypocrisy in response to Hanson is that both Labor and the Coalition closely collaborate with One Nation. The xenophobic party has been the most consistent backer of the government’s

legislative agenda, voting for 74 percent of its policies between August and December last year. This support has been crucial because the government lacks a majority in the Senate, the upper house of parliament.

This week, the government reportedly signed a deal with One Nation to push through “media reform” legislation to boost the profits of corporate media empires. This will include a “competitive neutrality” inquiry into the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, demanded by One Nation, aimed at forcing the public broadcaster to toe the government line and give greater weight to Hanson’s xenophobic statements.

Labor also has worked closely with Hanson. In February, Hanson said she was in “constant contact” with Labor leader Bill Shorten, saying: “He picks my brains for policies.” Labor has campaigned around the slogan of “Australians First” this year, scapegoating foreign workers for mounting poverty and joblessness, and calling for the expansion of reactionary tariffs and other economic nationalist measures.

The record makes clear that Hanson is the diseased by-product of the policies implemented by Labor and the Coalition.

To the extent that One Nation has been able to win limited support from the most disoriented and oppressed sections of the population, that has been the result of incessant media promotion, and Hanson’s ability to capitalise on opposition to the pro-business agenda imposed by successive governments.

At the same time, the emergence of right-wing and populist parties, seeking to divert anger over inequality and poverty into reactionary and nationalist channels, is a result of the deepening social crisis. Responsibility for this lies above all with Labor and the corporatised trade unions, which have overseen an unending assault on the jobs, wages and social conditions of the working class over the past three decades.



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