

Right-wing senator calls for a “White Australia” immigration policy

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The maiden Senate speech of Fraser Anning, representing the right-wing populist Katter’s Australian Party, has highlighted the racist and deeply anti-democratic implications of the attacks on immigrants and refugees, and the continuous stoking of nationalism by the entire political establishment.

Speaking on Tuesday night, Anning launched a diatribe against migrants. He effectively called for the reintroduction of the “White Australia” immigration policy, under which successive Labor and conservative governments, with the fervent support of the trade unions, banned “non-European” migration from Federation in 1901 until the mid-1960s.

Anning declared: “We as a nation are entitled to insist that those who are allowed to come here predominantly reflect the historic European-Christian composition of Australian society.”

The senator claimed that migrants were “self-segregating” and were responsible for “white flight” from many suburbs. He slandered Muslim migrants as “welfare dependent,” “criminals” and potential “terrorists,” and advocated a ban on further Muslim migration.

Anning called for a plebiscite on whether the population “want wholesale non-English speaking immigrants from the third world, and particularly whether they want any Muslims.” He said this would be a “final solution to the immigration problem.”

Anning’s subsequent claim that the phrase “final solution” was of no significance does not hold water. The term is forever associated with the Nazi regime’s genocide of European Jewry. Appearing in a speech calling for racially-exclusive immigration, the phrase was an unmistakable dog whistle to fascistic sympathisers. Anning’s speech was peppered with other staples of this milieu, including denunciations of “cultural Marxism” and homophobic rhetoric.

In a further indication that Anning’s statements were a

calculated pitch to a far-right constituency, his party leader Bob Katter aggressively defended the speech on Wednesday, declaring that he agreed with it “a thousand percent.”

The speech, and particularly the phrase “final solution,” triggered an outpouring of pious hypocrisy by other members of parliament. Senior representatives of the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party—who are jointly responsible for the brutal persecution of refugees, discriminatory immigration policies and the stoking of xenophobia—donned the mantle of “acceptance.”

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Labor leader Bill Shorten summed up the real concerns, warning that Anning’s language was “divisive” and undermined “Australian values.” In a demonstration of their unity, Turnbull and Shorten shook hands across the parliamentary floor after denouncing the speech.

The major parties fear that by giving unvarnished expression to the racism and nationalism they have promoted, Anning risks further discrediting the entire political establishment and inflaming widespread opposition to the bipartisan attacks on refugees and immigrants.

Likewise, every other parliamentary party criticised the speech, even Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party, which is notorious for scapegoating Muslim immigrants. On Wednesday, the Senate passed a motion condemning the “White Australia” policy and hailing its formal abandonment.

All the official parties are desperately trying to cover up the fact that Anning’s rant is the logical conclusion of the policies they have promoted.

For the past two decades, Australian politics has been dominated by the demonisation of Muslims. In the bogus “war on terror,” Muslim youth have been relentlessly vilified, while working class communities have been

subjected to surveillance and harassment by the police and intelligence agencies.

Parallel with the “war on terror,” successive Labor and Liberal-National governments have ensured Australia has one of harshest regimes against refugees in the world. They have both consigned all asylum-seekers who seek to reach Australia by boat to concentration camps on remote Pacific islands. The program, which UN bodies have declared violates international law, has led to numbers of deaths.

Since 2016, a nationalist campaign has been waged, by the major parties, the corporate media and the intelligence agencies, alleging that China is seeking to dominate Australian politics, business, universities and virtually every aspect of society.

The hysteria over purported Chinese influence has been aimed at legitimising Australia’s central role in the US-led preparations for war with China. It was invoked by the Coalition government and the Labor Party opposition to push sweeping “foreign interference” laws through parliament in June. The legislation could be used to ban anti-war activities, and political organisations that engage in internationally-coordinated campaigns.

Echoing the anti-Asian thrust of the “White Australia” program, Clive Hamilton, a prominent Greens member, has suggested that many of the 1.3 million Australian residents of Chinese descent are likely “not loyal” and could constitute an enemy “fifth column” in the event of war.

For the past 12 months, all the official parties have endorsed a purge to remove members of parliament who hold, or are even entitled to, dual citizenship. The campaign, based on reactionary provisions of the 1901 constitution introduced during the “White Australia” period, renders more than half the population—including anyone who was born overseas, or whose parents come from another country—ineligible for federal office unless they “renounce” their “foreign” loyalties.

Amid a deepening social crisis, and indications of renewed social and political struggles by workers, the political establishment is desperately seeking to divide the working class with racism and xenophobia.

To the extent that right-wing populists such as Anning can win any support, it is a direct result of the social misery created by the pro-business policies of Labor and Liberal-National governments over the past three decades, which have destroyed hundreds of thousands of jobs, and gutted public education, healthcare and other social services.

In the lead up to a Victorian state election this November and a federal election to be held before next May, the major parties and a raft of right-wing organisations are competing to be the “toughest” on immigration.

The Coalition government has boasted that a “visa crackdown” resulted in net migration falling to its lowest level in more than a decade last financial year. Senior Coalition figures have called for further restrictions and have blamed migration for failing infrastructure.

Labor leader Bill Shorten has hit back at any suggestion that he will close the refugee camps, declaring that any government he led would continue to “stop the boats.” It was the previous Labor government that reopened the camps in the Pacific and decreed the asylum-seekers sent there would never come to Australia.

Labor’s anti-immigrant campaign has been supported by the trade unions. Last May, the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union intervened to shut down the Victorian state Labor conference to prevent motions being debated that nominally criticised the persecution of refugees. The unions have also collaborated with Labor against “foreign” workers on temporary visas, falsely alleging that they are responsible for rising unemployment.

And both Labor and the Coalition recently escalated a two-year-long witch hunt, accusing working-class youth of African background of being responsible for a supposed epidemic of crime in the Victorian capital of Melbourne. Turnbull and senior figures in his government have supported the transparently racist campaign, as has the Victorian state Labor government, joined by the same far-right organisations to which Anning’s speech appealed. Members of the African community have reported a substantial rise in race-related assaults and vilification.

The alternative to the poisonous nationalism emanating from the political establishment is the fight for the unity of the international working class, in a common struggle for a workers’ government and the socialist reorganisation of society in the interests of ordinary people, not the profit dictates of the financial and corporate elite.



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