

Ex-Australian Labor Party leader joins far-right anti-immigrant One Nation

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A revealing editorial appeared last week in the *Australian*, the Murdoch media's national flagship, welcoming the announcement by former Australian Labor Party leader Mark Latham that he had joined Senator Pauline Hanson's extreme right-wing One Nation.

The November 8 editorial described Latham as a "mercurial political figure" who had made "thought-provoking contributions to national debate." While expressing reservations about Latham's "volatility," it declared that he "may not only boost One Nation's profile in the most populous state but also increase its intellectual depth and guarantee its medium-term existence."

Latham will be One Nation's lead candidate in next year's New South Wales state election, in which he could possibly secure an eight-year term in the state parliament's upper house. That would hand another prominent platform to Latham, who has been published and featured by Murdoch outlets, such as Sky News and the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, as well as the *Australian Financial Review*, since he quit as Labor leader in 2005 after a disastrous election loss.

Standing alongside a beaming Hanson at a nationally-televised media conference, Latham said he felt compelled to "get stuck in" as a parliamentarian to fight for "civilisational values," including "love of country," which were "under siege from the left."

Hanson, who has agitated against indigenous people, welfare recipients, "Asians" and Muslims since she was first elevated to media prominence in 1996, said she was "so proud" to have Latham on her team.

In subsequent media interviews, Latham said he would campaign on "hot-button issues" such as immigration, congestion and "political correctness." These are code words for scapegoating and demonising

Muslim and other immigrant workers. He said he shared the "Sydney is full" attitude of former Labor state Premier Bob Carr, claiming that "over-population" was making the city "dysfunctional."

The Hanson-Latham union, and the extraordinary media publicity given to it, is another stark example of the intense efforts being made within the ruling class to fashion new far-right, nationalist and xenophobic political formations and push the entire parliamentary establishment further in that Trump-style direction. This is in line with the elevation of far-right and fascistic parties in Europe and elsewhere, blaming immigrants for the social crisis produced by the profit system and exploiting the hostility toward the old social democratic and conservative capitalist parties.

With popular support continuing to implode for Australia's two traditional ruling parties, Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition, after years of declining working and living conditions, attempts are being stepped up to divert the political and social discontent in reactionary channels in preparation for economic crisis and war. This is under conditions in which the world is being convulsed by US President Donald Trump's trade war measures against China and the growing danger of US-provoked wars.

The *Australian's* editorial not only hailed the Hanson-Latham partnership but also used it to prod the government further in the same right-wing populist direction. It warned Morrison, who was installed as prime minister on August 24, via an inner-Liberal Party coup against his predecessor Malcolm Turnbull, that he was "running out of time to convince mainstream voters that he is acting decisively to address their concerns."

While today's Labor leaders have tried to dismiss Latham as a "joke," his embrace of Hanson is not an

aberration. However, it is entirely in keeping with Labor's founding "White Australia" policy—a racist program shared with the trade union leadership to divide workers in Australia from their fellow workers across Asia and internationally.

Despite "White Australia's" formal ditching in the 1960s, because of Australian capitalism's growing dependence on Asian markets, this nationalist and protectionist "anti-foreigner" program has remained central to the policies of Labor and the trade unions, and has been brought to the fore during every period of war and economic breakdown.

Significantly, Latham was still a member of the Labor Party until last year—in fact, he proposed himself as a federal election candidate in 2016. He was only expelled after he publicly joined the extreme "free market" Liberal Democrats of Senator David Leyonhjelm in a bid to secure a Senate nomination from that group.

Moreover, the entire Labor leadership enthusiastically backed Latham when he was installed as party leader in 2003 with the clear support of both the Murdoch and Fairfax media, especially the *Australian Financial Review*.

In the pages of these publications, Latham had been an unabashed advocate of slashing social spending, cutting taxes for high-income recipients and dismantling welfare and education entitlements in line with the requirements of global capitalism. Under the slogans of "user pays", "individual responsibility" and getting people to "work hard" in order to "climb" the supposed "ladder of opportunity," he championed the junking of the post-World War II welfare state.

This was a threadbare justification for deepening social inequality—lauding the small minority who acquire wealth by the most ruthless means, and vilifying workers and youth for failing to scramble up the "ladder of opportunity." Labor's pitch proved a disaster at the 2004 election. Its primary vote plunged to 37.65 percent—the lowest for three quarters of a century—and John Howard's Liberal-National Coalition gained control of both houses of parliament.

Despite the political logic of Latham's historical evolution, the Latham-Hanson partnership marks another lurch to the right within the political establishment. When Hanson first emerged in 1996, the media depicted her as an interloper and "outsider,"

even though the Howard government and the Labor party soon largely adopted her policies directed against refugees and welfare dependants.

One Nation capitalised on the ongoing discontent produced by the Hawke and Keating Labor governments from 1983 to 1996 to win a quarter of the vote in the Queensland state election in 1998, threatening to further undermine the two-party system. Hanson and her party were subjected to a campaign of destabilisation by the media and political establishment, culminating in her jailing on concocted electoral funding charges.

However, such is the level of public hostility to the old parties that Hanson was again promoted to make a return to parliament in 2016, via a double dissolution election of both houses. Coalition leaders soon embraced her. Hanson provided key votes for the government in the Senate, including on cutting corporate taxes. Ex-Prime Minister Tony Abbott launched a book of her speeches this year. Its cover photograph featured Hanson unfurling herself from a black burqa, reprising her provocative stunt in the Senate last year, when she entered the chamber wearing the full-length Islamic headdress in a bid to whip up anti-Muslim prejudice.

The Hanson-Latham union is also likely to feature anti-Chinese witch-hunting and pro-war militarism. In Hanson's first Senate speech in 2016, she claimed Australia was being taken over by the "oppressive communist" Chinese government via land and asset purchases, the kind of "foreign takeover" that Australians had fought and died in wars to prevent.

With Turnbull's removal—the fourth prime minister to be ousted by their own party in eight years—highlighting the instability of the parliamentary elite, Hanson and Latham have become part of wider moves to refashion the entire set-up, along the lines of Trump-style nationalism, populism and authoritarianism, in preparation for war and immense social and political conflict.



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