

Fascist group exposed in youth wing of Australia's National Party

Oscar Grenfell

22 November 2018

An Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) “Background Briefing” program last month exposed a fascistic group inside the youth wing of the rural-based National Party, which is in coalition governments with the Liberal Party at the federal level and in a number of states.

Members of the group had been permitted to join the New South Wales (NSW) state branch of the Young Nationals and were elected to executive posts in the organisation. Following the ABC program, the executive of the NSW Nationals banned 22 members for life and prohibited members from involvement with a number of extreme right-wing parties and organisations. It was a damage-control operation.

According to “Background Briefing,” individuals associated with the “alt-right,” the umbrella term for a far-right and fascistic movement, joined the Nationals in late 2017 and early 2018.

The program stated they had discussed infiltrating “mainstream” political parties in a closed Facebook group called “The New Guard.”

The name is significant. The New Guard was a paramilitary and political organisation founded in NSW in 1931. Modelled on fascist movements in Europe and promoted by sections of the political establishment, its members, including former soldiers, carried out violent attacks on socialist and left-wing organisations, and discussed plans for a coup against the NSW Labor government of Premier Jack Lang.

The media depicted the expelled individuals as attempting a hostile infiltration, before being eventually repelled by the National Party. In reality, the far-right elements gained entry into one of the capitalist elite's main parties under conditions of a shift to the right by the entire political establishment to seek to divert mounting popular social and political disaffection in nationalist and xenophobic directions.

As in the US and Europe, Trump-style and “alt right” formations are only able to gain traction by exploiting the political alienation and hostility felt by broad layers of the

population, including in working class and rural areas, who have suffered decades of declining economic and social conditions at the hands of the corporate elite and the establishment parties—Labor, the Liberal-National Coalition and the Greens.

The extreme right-wing grouping in the National Party came to prominence at this April's conference of the NSW Young Nationals. The faction unsuccessfully introduced motions calling for the national immigration intake to be restricted largely to “culturally compatible peoples” and for white South Africans to be granted refugee status.

Both motions echoed positions that have been advanced within the federal parliament, including in a recent vote by the Coalition for a white supremacist “It's OK to be white” Senate resolution moved by One Nation leader Pauline Hanson, an outspoken agitator against refugees, Muslims and “Asians.”

At the April conference, a known alt-right figure, Clifford Jennings, was nominated to serve on the Young Nationals NSW executive by Jeff McCormack, a federal National Party advisor. According to “Background Briefing,” in a March 2017 Facebook poll, Jennings described himself as an “Ethno Nationalist” who favoured “Race over all.”

Jennings was previously a prominent member of the Young Liberals club at the University of Sydney, one of Australia's most prestigious. In an interview in January 2017, Jennings claimed to have created “alt-right Australia.” In April 2017, he organised a “Dingoes” conference attended by fascistic figures.

Others who supported Jennings at the Young Nationals conference had openly described themselves as “fascists” and admirers of Adolf Hitler on social media. Some had advocated violence against “the left.”

Among Jennings' associates were members of the Lads Society, a fascist organisation which has club houses in Melbourne and Sydney. Its members are encouraged to study Mein Kampf and other fascist texts, and train in boxing and combat sports.

At least one of those who joined with Jennings was

allegedly affiliated with Antipodean Resistance when he entered the Nationals.

This group, which has close links to the Lads Society, likens itself to “a 21st Century Hitler Youth” outfit. Its anonymous members have repeatedly put up vile posters calling for the murder of Jews, gays and other minorities. They have uploaded films of themselves carrying out military-style hikes in rural areas.

National Party adviser Jeff McCormack reportedly defended Jennings against those at the conference who objected to his extreme right-wing politics. McCormack is a member of the federal National Party secretariat and the former campaign manager of current NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro.

An article in the *Australian* in May stated that McCormack had “told the executive that if they did not let certain people in the party they could be ‘sued’, so elections went ahead and Mr Jennings was elected.” McCormack successfully nominated Jennings to a position on the NSW Young Nationals executive.

The National Party has sought to downplay the fascistic politics of those involved. Despite his documented views, an Australian Associated Press article on October 31 reported that Jennings and 20 others had been cleared “of having neo-Nazi links” by a National Party “initial investigation.”

In comments to the media, Barnaby Joyce, a former deputy prime minister, likened the exposure of the far-right individuals to a “McCarthyist witch-hunt.” However, he later retracted the comment.

The state Labor Party has demanded that the Nationals release the names of those who have been banned. Labor and the Greens have adopted a cynical posture of shock and outrage over the presence of the right-wing grouping. Yet, by long enforcing the dictates of the corporate elite, they bear the central responsibility for the emergence of right-wing populist and fascistic elements.

Labor itself was founded on the racist White Australia program, and has also sought to whip-up hostility to immigrants and refugees. The Greens have supported federal Labor governments as they have persecuted immigrants and imposed austerity measures on the working class as a whole. Like all the official parliamentary parties, they are based on Australian nationalism.

Labor and the unions have played a pernicious role, scapegoating “foreign workers” for a deepening social crisis caused by their pro-business policies. In a bipartisan front with the Coalition, they have also helped implement the persecution of refugees. Successive governments have transported asylum-seekers to concentration camps in the Pacific.

At the same time, both Labor and the Coalition, along with

the media, have bombarded the population with nationalist propaganda aimed at justifying Australia’s involvement in US-led wars and military preparations, including for conflict with China. Its purpose has been to intimidate widespread anti-war sentiment.

The promotion of far-right politics in Australia is part of an international process. The right-wing “Alternative for Germany” has been elevated to the position of official opposition in the country’s parliament, the Bundestag. Its xenophobic and anti-immigrant policies are largely being enacted by the Grand Coalition government composed of the Christian Democrats and the Social Democratic Party, which is also rapidly militarising in preparation for war.

In the United States, the Trump administration has adopted a program of “America First” nationalism, characterised by vicious attacks on immigrants, a turn to increasingly anti-democratic methods of rule, trade war and militarism. The US Democrats and trade unions have mounted no opposition to these policies, because they agree with them.

In Australia, sections of the Liberal-National Coalition have actively sought to develop an extreme right-wing movement based on anti-immigrant racism. This was a key factor underlying the political coup against former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull last August, spearheaded by Tony Abbott, Peter Dutton and the most right-wing sections of the Coalition.

The cultivation of fascist forces is the response in ruling circles to the resurgence of working class struggles and the pronounced turn by layers of workers and youth towards a socialist perspective. The aim is to create a political base hostile to socialism and prepared to use violence against the emerging opposition to war, austerity and authoritarianism.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact