

# Australian senator participates in neo-Nazi rally

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After heavy promotion in the media, a neo-Nazi rally in Melbourne on Saturday gathered fewer than 150 fascists at St Kilda beach and failed in its aim of fomenting a pogrom against young people of African background. The most politically significant aspect of the rally was the presence of federal Senator Fraser Anning who openly solidarised himself with the white supremacist racism of the neo-Nazis.

The rally was organised amid an ongoing, racist campaign by the media and political establishment over so-called “African gangs” in Melbourne. Whether an incident of theft and assault is reported as news or not now depends on the colour of the alleged perpetrator’s skin. If black, then the spectre of “African gangs” is immediately invoked. The press previously promoted the threat purportedly posed by the so-called “Apex gang,” even after the police admitted no such group existed. In the last month, a new alleged gang, comprising children aged between 14 and 17 and labelled “Blood Drill Killers,” has led to further lurid headlines.

Several openly fascist groups, led by the United Patriots Front, sought to capitalise on the media-stoked xenophobia by organising an event to “take back” St Kilda beach. United Patriots Front leader Blair Cottrell, a convicted criminal and admirer of Adolf Hitler, organised the provocation in a Melbourne suburb that has a large Jewish population. Just days earlier, neo-Nazis stuck swastikas on a nearby aged-care home. Fascist supporters openly discussed in online forums their hope to recreate the violence seen in Cronulla, Sydney in 2005, when Muslim beach-goers were attacked by a racist mob incited and encouraged by media shock jocks.

Senator Fraser Anning promoted the rally last week through several racist posts on Twitter. The day before the event, he posted a digitally altered image featuring black men with knives alongside a burning Australian flag, with a statement labelling “black Africans” as “grubs” who “hunt in packs like stalking jackals.”

Anning appeared alongside Cottrell during the rally. Several of those in attendance were recorded giving the fascist salute, while one appeared wearing an SS helmet.

A massive deployment of police was ordered by the Victorian Labor Party government to prevent a confrontation between the neo-Nazis and a far larger counter-demonstration organised by anti-racist groups.

Anning later denied that the event was a “racist rally” and falsely declared that the only Nazi salutes were given by the counter-protestors. The Queensland senator described the fascists as “decent Australian people.” Anning also defended claiming parliamentary subsidies for his return business class flight from Brisbane to Melbourne to attend the rally, declaring it was “official business.”

Anning was elected to parliament in 2016 as a member of the extreme-right One Nation Party, only to subsequently defect to the Katter Australia Party. He now sits as an independent, following the furore over his parliamentary maiden speech last August, in which he called for a return to a “White Australia” immigration policy. Combining ferocious anti-communism with anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim demagoguery, Anning demanded a “final solution to the immigration problem.”

Anning’s attendance at the rally has provoked an outpouring of utterly hypocritical criticism in the media and by mainstream political figures. The chief responsibility for Anning’s presence in the parliament, and the emergence of fascist groupings like the United Patriots Front, lies with the entire Australian political establishment. For decades, successive Liberal-National Coalition and Labor governments have stoked paranoia over refugees attempting to enter the country. Since 2001 and the launch of the “war on terror,” the Muslim community has been vilified and persecuted as potential terrorists to justify Australian involvement in the invasions and occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the US-led intervention in Syria.

Since 2016, under conditions in which Australia is fully aligned with the US military build-up in Asia and preparations for war with China, a new campaign has developed alleging that Australians of Chinese background are potentially a dangerous fifth column for the Chinese regime.

In every instance, the scapegoating is intended to divert mounting social tensions into reactionary nationalist channels and protect the interests of the corporate elite. Amid a worsening economic and political crisis, its purpose is to promote division and backwardness and cut across the development of unified working-class resistance to deepening social inequality and hardship.

Twelve months ago, in an open pitch to a narrow extreme right wing constituency, then Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull denounced “African gang crime,” alleging that it was responsible for “growing lawlessness” in Victoria. Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton followed with the claim that people in Melbourne were “scared” to go out to dinner because of “these gangs.” The federal Labor opposition joined in by criticising the government for not handing over more money to the Australian Federal Police.

The state Victorian Labor government of Premier Daniel Andrews responded by boasting of its “law and order” credentials, including locking up children in adult high security prisons, increasing mandatory jail terms for various offences, and increasing police spending by an unprecedented \$2 billion, expanding the number of officers by 20 percent.

The entire media, from the Murdoch press to the state-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation, has given prominent coverage to so-called African crime on the one hand, and has increasingly promoted various right wing and openly fascist formations on the other.

In January last year, Channel 7 News featured a segment describing Blair Cottrell and other fascists as “patriots,” and promoting their attempt to create violent vigilante groups as “a kind of neighbourhood watch.” The ABC reported a December 28 provocation staged on St Kilda beach by fascist Neil Erikson—who aggressively video-recorded a group of black youth peacefully playing soccer—as a “clash” between “activists” and “youths of African appearance.”

The Australian ruling class, steeped in colonial genocide and white nationalism, has a long record of promoting racist divide-and-rule policies. However, the emergence and promotion of neo-Nazi tendencies now reflects international processes.

Fascist movements in Europe and other regions have emerged due to high-level sponsorship from within the state apparatus. In Germany, for example, the neo-Nazis in the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) were designated the official opposition party in the Reichstag despite winning just 12 percent of the vote. The German fascists also benefitted from support from the media, academia, and within the security apparatus, including the secret service. In Italy, the ultra-right Lega party has been brought directly into the government.

The small attendance at Saturday’s racist rally in Melbourne—despite the wide media coverage beforehand—underscores the absence of a mass constituency in Australia for fascism. The involvement of Senator Fraser Anning, however, must be taken by the working class as a serious warning. Extreme right-wing forces now enjoy open support from within the federal parliament. There is no reason to doubt that, just as in Europe, they have sympathisers within the state apparatus, including the military, the police and intelligence apparatus.

The New Year statement published by the WSWs on January 3, “The Strategy of International Class Struggle and the Political Fight Against Capitalist Reaction in 2019,” explained: “Fascism is not yet, as it was in the 1930s, a mass movement. But to ignore the growing danger would be politically irresponsible. With the support of sections of the ruling class and the state, right-wing movements have been able to exploit demagogically the frustration and anger felt by the broad mass of the population.”

The statement continued: “In this situation, the fight against the resurgence of extreme right-wing and fascistic movements is an urgent political task. All historical experience—and, in particular, the events of the 1930s—demonstrates that the fight against fascism can be developed only on the basis of the independent mobilisation of the working class against capitalism.”

In Australia this means that workers and young people need to break with the nationalist and pro-capitalist Labor Party and trade unions, which are chiefly responsible of the worsening social crisis facing the working class, and take up the fight for socialism by joining and building the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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