

Australian parliament condemns “far-right and far-left extremism”

Oscar Grenfell
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A little-reported motion, passed by the Australian Senate last Thursday, has again demonstrated the promotion of extreme-right tendencies by the federal Liberal-National government, and its attempts to downplay the threat of fascistic networks, including those linked to political violence.

Kristina Keneally, a prominent Labor senator, drafted a motion which warned of a “significant increase in far-right extremism in Australia.” The government then rewrote the motion, transforming it into a series of talking points associated with the alt-right organisations that Keneally was condemning, and passed it with the support of senators from the xenophobic One Nation party and the populist Centre Alliance.

Keneally’s motion drew attention to a gathering of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Network (NSN) at the end of last month. For several days, between 30 and 40 NSN members hiked through the Grampians National Park in Western Victoria, menacing ordinary people who came upon them and shouting fascist slogans. The Nazis marched through the tourist town of Halls Gap and also held a cross-burning, modelled on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan.

The gathering expressed the emboldenment of longstanding extreme-right networks. Unlike on previous hiking trips, the NSN members made no attempts to conceal their political views from others or to avoid confrontations with members of the public. Keneally noted that the display was timed to coincide with Australia Day, the nationalist celebration of the colonisation of Australia, and International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Keneally’s motion pointed to an “overlap” between the extreme-right and various conspiracy theories disseminated online. It highlighted the fact that two government backbenchers, National MP George Christensen and Liberal representative Craig Kelly, have actively promoted such theories.

Both identified themselves with former US President Donald Trump’s claim that the 2020 American election had been “stolen.” They thus legitimised the big lie that served as the pretext for Trump’s attempted coup on January 6, when he mobilised a fascistic mob to storm the Capitol and try to prevent the certification of Democratic Party President Joseph Biden. Afterwards, Kelly and Christensen repeated the absurd claims of Trump’s supporters that the Capitol rioters had been anti-fascist activists in disguise.

Kelly and Christensen have cultivated ties to the extreme-right over an extended period. Christensen spoke at rallies organised by the anti-Muslim Reclaim Australia movement in 2015, out of

which the NSN emerged. Kelly has championed anti-lockdown protests over the past year, and has falsely claimed that vitamin supplements and antiseptic treatments can be used as cures for the coronavirus.

Keneally called on Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton to “combat the spread of far-right extremism in their party.”

Significantly, the Liberal-National counter-motion was presented by Simon Birmingham, a senior MP who is the leader of the government in the Senate and its finance minister.

Gone were the references to Kelly and Christensen, as well as the opening sentence noting a “significant increase in far-right extremism.” All mentions of the “far-right” that were kept in the motion were coupled with “far-left.”

The condemnation of the NSN, an organisation which advocates “race war” and glorifies the Holocaust, was followed by a denunciation of “all other extremist groups which seek to promote fascism, communism, anarchism, bigotry and violence in our community.”

This was drawn straight from the playbook of Trump. Throughout his presidency, when asked to condemn fascistic organisations that supported him, Trump would prevaricate, before stating that he opposed right and left-wing “extremism” equally. He would then declare that there were “good people” among the fascists. This was Trump’s response when white supremacists went on a rampage against anti-fascist protesters in Charlottesville in 2017, murdering one of them and injuring dozens more.

The Australian government’s line is the same. Christensen and Kelly are shielded, with senior MPs declaring that the two are “entitled to their views,” thereby legitimising their promotion of positions associated with the fascistic right. A hypocritical, pro-forma criticism of the “extreme right,” is then linked to a denunciation of the “extreme left,” falsely tarnishing the latter with the brush of “violence” and “bigotry.”

The political pedigree of the government motion was demonstrated by the fact that Pauline Hanson, the leader of One Nation, was the first to speak in favour of it. Hanson has championed anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant xenophobia for more than 20 years. Prominent members of her party all but cheered Trump on as he sought to overthrow the US election result. But she too declared that it was necessary to be “balanced” and to condemn “extremism whether it’s from the far-right or the far-left.”

This attempt to draw equivalence between fascist groups and supporters of communism is an historically and politically obscene falsification.

Fascism has always been promoted by the ruling elites in periods of capitalist crisis. Its central aim is to mobilise sections of the middle class to smash the resistance of the working class. Amid the social upheavals of the 20th century, fascist movements were used by sections of the establishment to institute brutal dictatorships that abolished the rights and organisations of the working class, while advancing the interests of the capitalist class.

Communists and socialists, fighting for an end to inequality and imperialist war, and for the social and democratic rights of working people, have always been the central targets of the fascists.

Those who warn against “left-wing violence,” including Trump and the Australian government, are incapable of pointing to any concrete examples of this supposed threat. Their aim, through lies and slander, is to present the struggle against capitalism—the dominance of society by the banks and the major corporations—as illegitimate and violent.

By contrast, right-wing extremist violence is all too real. The majority of terror attacks in the US since September 11 have been carried out by fascist and white supremacist organisations. In this region, the danger was revealed in the March 2019 attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Australian-born fascist Brenton Tarrant murdered 51 people and maimed 40.

Thomas Sewell, the leader of the NSN, had previously sought to recruit Tarrant. The terrorist’s connections to Australian organisations have never been seriously probed, at least publicly, while his sentencing last year and the release of an official New Zealand report into the attack were treated as non-events by the Australian political and media establishment.

Government ministers, who generally treat the statements of ASIO, Australia’s domestic spy agency, as the unchallengeable truth, have downplayed its warnings that far-right terrorism poses a substantial threat, and accounts for up to 40 percent of their current investigations.

The government stance and its motion are part of a protracted attempt to cultivate an extreme right-wing constituency. The aim of figures such as Christensen and Kelly, who are defended by senior government ministers, is to bring this milieu under the umbrella of the Liberal-National Coalition, to prevent sections of its base turning to right-wing populist third parties.

At the same time, the turn to extreme-right forces is a response by sections of the ruling elite to immense social and political opposition in the working class, accelerated by the criminally-negligent, pro-business response to the pandemic and the further transfer of wealth to the financial elite that has accompanied it. The aim is to divert discontent in a reactionary, nationalist direction, to develop a right-wing base that can be mobilised against the working class and to shift official politics even further to the right.

Labor plays a central role in facilitating this. In the first instance, Keneally presented the motion, knowing that the government, together with the right-wing crossbenchers in the Senate, would have enough votes to substantially alter its contents. She thus

effectively gave the government a free kick.

Keneally and Labor, moreover, have presented the threat of far-right extremism solely as an issue of “national security,” calling for the NSN to be outlawed under counter-terrorism legislation.

This serves to cover-up the fact that the entire political establishment, including Labor, has created the conditions for the growth of such forces. Labor, which was founded on the program of “white Australia,” has spearheaded the assault on refugees and immigrants, overseen or supported every Australian imperialist war and intervention and promoted noxious nationalism.

The extreme-right is only able to gain traction, moreover, as a result of the social devastation, imposed by pro-business Labor governments, beginning with the Hawke and Keating governments of the 1980s. The transformation of Labor and the unions into openly corporatist entities, and their smashing up of a workers’ movement that previously existed, has created a toxic political environment, enabling right-wing forces to capitalise on mounting social misery.

With their calls for the illegalisation of the NSN, Keneally and Labor are seeking to bolster the sweeping counter-terrorism regime that has been used repeatedly over the past twenty years to entrap disoriented Muslim youth. Under the banner of the bogus “war on terror,” fundamental civil liberties have been eroded, as police powers for warrantless search and seizure operations and other attacks on democratic rights have been dramatically expanded.

Labor’s position is creating a dangerous political dynamic.

Labor representatives declare that the right-wing extremist groups must be banned under reactionary counter-terrorism legislation. The government responds that it is necessary to combat “right and left-wing extremism.” The logic is for attacks on the legal and democratic rights of socialist and left-wing organisations.



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