

Fascist protest leaders welcomed into the Australian parliament

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9 February 2022

On Tuesday, the stepped-up promotion of an extreme right-wing movement by sections of the political establishment and the ruling elite found its starkest expression yet.

Craig Kelly, a prominent MP who only resigned from the Liberal-National Coalition government last year, ushered six far-right activists into the federal parliament building and cloistered with them in his office. They presented a letter, outlining a series of demands for an immediate end to the handful of COVID restrictions that remain, including limited vaccine mandates. Kelly declared that he would hand the document directly to his former leader, Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

The six were brought in as representatives of a “freedom convoy” that has held protests in Canberra, the national capital, this week. The small gatherings have been given outsized coverage in the corporate media, and are modelled on similar right-wing mobilisations in Canada, New Zealand and elsewhere.

Commentary in the press has highlighted Kelly’s supposed eccentricity and the freakshow character of the visit. But it is a serious warning to the working class. Individuals playing a leading role in a fascistic movement, heavily associated with threats of political violence, were brought into parliament, amid a ban on public visitors, without any apparent attempt to block them by the government, Labor or the intelligence agencies.

Among Kelly’s guests was Simeon Boikov. He is the leader of a small Australian Cossack group, and combines support for the Russian state with hardline Australian nationalism. Boikov has spoken alongside Australian representatives of Golden Dawn, the Greek neo-Nazi organisation, and has publicly associated with Jim Saleam, leader of the Australia First Party.

Saleam was sent to prison in the 1990s for ordering a shotgun attack on the home of Eddie Funde, the Australian representative of the African National Congress, in the culmination of a wave of violence he allegedly orchestrated against left-wing figures.

Boikov has recently been the subject of a Firearm Protection Order, an uncommon measure imposed by the New South Wales police commissioner, banning an individual from possessing a gun or ammunition and granting police wide-ranging powers to search for infringements. He is standing as

an independent candidate for the seat of Strathfield in an upcoming Sydney by-election and has been endorsed by Kelly.

Another of the guests was Cindy Roberts. She was present at a December protest when other far-right activists allegedly set fire to the entrance of Old Parliament House. Last week Roberts posted footage taken outside the governor-general’s home, in which she declared “Your time is coming, it’s the gallows, it’s the gallows, it’s the gallows,” in comments apparently directed at Morrison.

These are individuals who must be well known to the intelligence agencies. They are hardly discreet about their politics.

The timing makes the entrance of such forces into parliament even more significant. The government and the entire political establishment are in an unprecedented crisis. Decades-long hostility to the major parties and their program of social austerity has been greatly intensified by mass opposition to the “let it rip” pandemic policies of the past two months, which overturned previously successful public health measures and have resulted in an unprecedented COVID surge.

Morrison’s polling results have been the lowest of his prime ministership. His ability to survive until the next federal election, due to be held in May, has been called into question by the eruption of open factional warfare within the Coalition government. Elements of the Coalition have vocally opposed minimal vaccine mandates, with a backbench revolt on the issue stymying the government’s ability to pass any legislation late last year.

It is under these conditions, of a breakdown of the two-party parliamentary system, that extreme right-wing forces are being brought forward. Many of their positions on the pandemic dovetail directly with those of the ruling elite. Kelly’s guests, for instance, included a demand that state borders never be closed again, one of the central complaints of the corporate media throughout the pandemic.

The current protests began late last year. Initial participants were supporters of the “sovereign citizen” conspiracy theory. They claim that governments are fictional entities and illegitimate corporations, and assert, through convoluted pseudo-legal rhetoric, the right of individuals to do whatever they please, including to violate basic public health measures

during a pandemic.

Protesters included longstanding right-wingers, as well as a layer of Aboriginal nationalists, such as Roberts, who have adopted the “sovereign citizen” outlook. The latter have promoted medical misinformation opposing vaccines, contributing to the spread of COVID in oppressed Aboriginal communities. One of their leading members died of the coronavirus in December.

The fire lit at Old Parliament House was not an aberration. Some of the “sovereign citizen” groups erroneously believe that it is the seat of government, though it has not been for more than thirty years. Videos they posted to social media hinted at a plot to storm the building, which primarily functions as a museum, and to declare the government overthrown. They lamented that the plans had been foiled because of infighting and leaks.

The protesters then turned to the current Parliament House, establishing an encampment outside it. That was dismantled last week and the demonstrators, largely from out of town, relocated to Canberra’s showgrounds. They have held several protests at parliament this week, as it resumed sittings. The gatherings have been attended by a few thousand people at most, with a “freedom convoy” arriving on Tuesday.

Other right-wing groups are involved, including the Canberra chapter of the Proud Boys, the far-right US street gang. The disparate organisations have been brought together largely on the basis of opposition to vaccination, which is being used by fascist forces to try and build a broader constituency. Speakers have decried “tyranny,” and have insinuated that extreme measures must be taken to prevent its consolidation.

The protests are clearly modeled on similar movements internationally, including the “freedom convoy” that has besieged the Canadian parliament for almost two weeks, and the attempted coup led by Donald Trump, to try and overturn the US election result, on January 6, 2021.

As is the case internationally, the fascist forces are backed and encouraged by sections of the political establishment and the ruling elite. Kelly’s United Australia Party is led and funded by mining billionaire Clive Palmer. Its upcoming campaign in the federal election appears to be focused on an attempt to bring together the various anti-vaccination forces, including as candidates, on the basis of a right-wing populist program. Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party is appealing to the same layers.

The fact that Kelly was a member of the government a year ago, moreover, is not an accident. For several years, sections of the Coalition have sought to transform it into an alt-right style movement, taking inspiration from Trump. Morrison closely identified himself with the US president, and was one of the few world leaders who initially refused to condemn his coup attempt.

The Coalition has collaborated closely with Hanson and other right-wing figures, while it has competed with them for the

support of extreme right-wing elements.

More fundamental than sordid electoral calculations, however, is the flirtation of the government with openly authoritarian measures.

The fascistic forces are being brought forward, to shift official political discussion even further to the right. The aim is to drown out the genuine popular sentiments, of widespread hostility to war, inequality and the subordination of health and lives to private profit. The right-wing layers are being mobilised to intimidate growing working-class opposition and to prepare a battering ram that can be directed against its emerging struggles.

All of the official parties are responsible. By enforcing the dictates of big business and the banks over the past forty years, for an unceasing onslaught on jobs, wages and conditions, Labor and the unions have created the social crisis and the foul political climate in which the fascists can win a hearing. Both have played the central role in suppressing any independent struggle by the working class, including during the pandemic. This has provided the far-right with a monopoly on public oppositional activity.

Labor and the unions have championed the profits before lives program. In the forthcoming election, they are pitching themselves to the ruling elite as a more reliable instrument for imposing the “live with the virus” policies and the further pro-business restructuring that is to accompany them. At the same time, they are promoting filthy nationalism, with calls for greater Australian self-sufficiency, which they directly link to support for the US-led war preparations against China.

The fight against the fascist threat can only proceed through the development of an independent political movement of the working class, directed against the entire parliamentary set-up and the capitalist system that it defends.



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