

Far-right rallies in Australia feed off official demonisation of immigrants

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A nationally-coordinated “March for Australia” on Sunday was the largest mobilisation by the country’s far-right in years, possibly eclipsing anti-lockdown demonstrations early in the pandemic and anti-Muslim rallies held under the “Reclaim Australia” banner a decade ago.

According to police estimates, up to 15,000 participated in Sydney, with slightly lower numbers in Melbourne. Protests were held in most other capital cities as well as in several regional and rural centres.

The event highlighted the growing threat posed by the far right in Australia. It closely mirrored international developments, including in the US and Europe, where fascistic forces have won a following by exploiting a deepening social crisis and a political vacuum caused by the transformation of the old social-democratic parties and trade unions into the unalloyed instruments of the corporate and financial elite.

As with the growth of far-right forces globally, the central target of the marches was immigrants and refugees, who were vilified and scapegoated for virtually all social problems.

In Australia, the extent to which fascistic forces are capitalising on and giving expression to a broader lurch to the right of the political establishment is particularly clear.

Successive Labor and Liberal-National governments have set international benchmarks for the persecution of asylum seekers. Just days before the rallies, Labor’s Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke was in Nauru, signing a secret agreement with its government to banish more refugees to the tiny and impoverished Pacific island.

The protests have been condemned by the Labor governments, at the federal and state levels, and by most of the corporate media. But they did not fall from

a clear blue sky. They were connected by many threads to the political and media establishment itself.

The press gave the marches an inordinate amount of coverage in the lead-up. Massive protests over the past two years against the Israeli genocide in Gaza and Australia’s complicity in it have never received anything like that sort of de facto promotion. Instead, they have generally been blacked out both in the leadup and following the protests, even as tens of thousands take to the streets, or else slandered as antisemitic.

The “March for Australia” was largely built through various far-right social media pages. But national and state politicians also promoted and spoke at the event.

In Townsville, federal right-wing parliamentarian Bob Katter was the keynote speaker. In a video he posted calling on followers to attend the events, Katter declared: “It is wartime now, we are fighting to stop our country being flooded by immigration.”

Katter has a lengthy record of associating with the far-right. He has also collaborated closely with Liberal and, particularly, Labor governments.

Current Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, for instance, went on a tour with Katter in 2017 proclaiming: “He’s a mate of mine and I am proud to say that.” The same year, footage emerged of Katter bizarrely making a pledge of allegiance to the fascistic US-based Proud Boys organisation.

Federal MP Pauline Hanson and other parliamentary representatives of her One Nation party both promoted and attended the gathering. The anti-immigrant senator has a long record of collaborating with the major parties. In July 2024, for instance, former Labor minister Bill Shorten held a joint press conference with her on the need to slash services for the disabled.

The Libertarian Party was also involved, with its New South Wales state MP John Ruddick a featured speaker

in Sydney.

Much of the preview coverage in the official press focused on the claims of these figures and the nominal organisers of the marches that they were not racist or fascist but “ordinary Australians” standing up to “uncontrolled immigration.”

Notwithstanding, in both the Sydney and Melbourne protests, black-clad members of the National Socialist Network (NSN), an explicitly Nazi group, were permitted by organisers to lead the marches. Speakers made false claims about immigration numbers, blaming “foreigners” for the housing and cost-of-living crisis.

A preponderance of those in attendance at both were middle-aged or older men. Many were draped in Australian flags. The moronic “Aussie, Aussie, Aussie! Oi, oi, oi!” was repeated ad nauseam.

The speakers presented variations of the racist great replacement theory alleging the “white race” was being replaced due to immigration.

Given what was promoted by the organisers, it was no surprise that they turned over the rallies to NSN speakers. What the Nazis said were variations on a theme that had already been sounded. They branded themselves as advocates of a “white Australia,” insisting that all “non-Europeans” be deported.

The political violence implicit in what was said at all of the protests was enacted at the Melbourne demonstration. The NSN was filmed beating up counter-protesters, as well as other members of the far-right who objected to its presence for tactical reasons.

After the Melbourne rally, NSN members besieged Camp Sovereignty, a site established by Indigenous activists to mark Aboriginal graves. Footage posted to social media shows the Nazis charging the camp and punching and attacking people there, including women with no police to be seen.

That assault was led by NSN head Thomas Sewell, who shortly before had spoken to the demonstration. Sewell is an infamous figure, who is on record as having attempted to recruit Brenton Tarrant to his organisation, before the fascist massacred dozens of people at mosques in New Zealand.

The condemnations of the protest and its violence by Labor are utterly hypocritical. The far-right is pitching to a social crisis caused by Labor’s pro-business policies, including its rejection of any relief amid the soaring cost of living.

What the fascists are doing in seeking to scapegoat immigrants for that crisis is what Labor has actually carried out in government. It has demonised not only refugees, but also immigrants, particularly international students, blaming them for the growing financial hardships.

Albanese yesterday spoke of the importance of “multiculturalism.” But he referenced this record, noting that net overseas migration was falling under his government and would be cut further.

Albanese said there were “good people” in the rallies, but that they were being exploited by far-right agitators. The prime minister has never said anything similar about the mass pro-Palestinian protests, instead leading the campaign to fraudulently brand them as antisemitic.

The obvious point, that the threat of antisemitism emanates from the far-right, has been covered over by Albanese, Labor, the media and the Zionist lobbyists who function as the cheerleaders of Israeli war crimes.

The protests are being used to shift the needle of official politics even further to the right. Albanese’s comment about “good people” was mirrored in the financial press this morning, with the Australian Financial Review for instance claiming that the far-right mobs had “legitimate” grievances and calling for further “clarity” on migration.

In addition to diverting social tensions in reactionary directions, this is a response by the political establishment to the shift to the left of the vast majority of the population, especially workers and youth, expressed in the mass pro-Palestinian protests including one last month across the Sydney Harbour Bridge involving 300,000 people.



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