

# Former deputy Australian prime minister defects to far-right One Nation

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On Monday, Barnaby Joyce joined the far-right One Nation party, having resigned from the National Party in a statement he delivered on the floor of parliament in late November. The defection had been in the works for months, with Joyce openly raising it in the media and holding meetings with One Nation's leader Pauline Hanson.

Much of the commentary has focussed on Joyce's personal ambition. In his parliamentary statement, he likened his position on the backbench to an "ejector chair" from the building. Joyce and National Party leader David Littleproud are longtime factional opponents, with their antagonism such that they reportedly avoid being in the same room together.

Whatever the role of such immediate factors, however, they are expressions of more fundamental processes.

Joyce's defection is yet another expression of the crisis of the Coalition, the formation composed of the Nationals and the Liberal Party, which has been a central pillar of the two-party system throughout the post-World War II period. Notwithstanding his current position on the backbench, Joyce is a prominent figure, having been a previous National leader and deputy prime minister.

In the federal election in May this year, the Liberals suffered a wipeout. The urban-based party secured just nine out of 88 metropolitan seats, deepening a tendency that had been apparent in the previous two elections.

Underlying the crisis is the collapse of the Liberals' previous social constituency. The broad-based middle-class, on which it previously rested, no longer exists after decades of widening social polarisation. That has been expressed in the loss of a number of blue-ribbon seats, with Teal independents gaining support on the basis of pro-business policies and bogus appeals to environmental concerns.

The May defeat has been followed by factional warfare within the Liberal Party, ructions between the two parties of the Coalition and conflicts over political direction which have assumed an existential character.

Joyce's decision to join One Nation points to the trajectory. Whatever the twists and turns of the various intrigues, the lurch has been towards more openly far-right politics, both within the Coalition and more broadly in the political establishment.

The infighting within the Liberals has centred on the push by

prominent MPs for a far-right pitch. That included the Coalition's ditching of any nominal commitment to reducing carbon emissions to net-zero by 2050, calls for a more aggressive anti-immigrant campaign and for the promotion of an "Australia first" nationalism.

A factor, impelling this push within the Coalition, as well as Joyce's defection, is that One Nation is polling at record levels. A *Guardian* Essential Poll, released this morning, showed One Nation on 17 percent of the primary vote, or half that of the governing Labor Party and only nine percentage points behind the Coalition, which is at record lows of around 26 percent.

The polling suggests that amid its disarray, a layer of former Coalition voters and potentially members are shifting their support to One Nation.

In his statement announcing that he was joining that party, Joyce rolled off its various far-right positions, as well as making a populist pitch to growing discontent including particularly over the cost-of-living crisis.

Joyce declared that immigration had "removed the capacity for Australians to buy a home, have a family and increase our population by our own means." In a scarcely-veiled dogwhistle to anti-immigrant racism, he added: "a nation can have multiple faiths, race and colour but not multiple cultures." Joyce derided any measures to address climate change as "ludicrous quest to change the weather."

Appearing on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "7:30" program the night of his defection, Joyce made clear that he is consciously drawing on the playbook of far-right populist forces that have gained traction internationally.

Joyce was asked if he saw parallels between One Nation and Nigel Farage's Reform party in the United Kingdom. Under conditions where the Labour Party government of Keir Starmer is inflicting deep-going, pro-business austerity, Reform has come to prominence on the basis of populist anti-immigrant demagoguery, with some polling indicating it is on track to displace the Conservatives as the main opposition.

Joyce added that he thought Australia was "late to the party. Whether it's Farage in the UK, whether it's [Marine] Le Pen in France, whether it's [Giorgia] Meloni in Italy, whether it's the MAGA movement within the Republican movement in the United States, this is a phenomenon across the world."

Those right-wing formations have simultaneously capitalised on discontent with the pro-business policies of social-democratic and liberal parties, and have been promoted by sections of the ruling elite as a means of shifting towards more openly authoritarian forms of rule.

The pronounced swing to the right, exemplified by Trump's attempts to establish a fascistic dictatorship in the US, is a means of imposing the program of the capitalist class, of war and social austerity, and of repressing the inevitable resistance from the working class.

For years, sections of the Australian corporate and media establishment have toyed with the development of such a movement.

Since Hanson was reelected in 2015, the notoriously xenophobic One Nation has centred its agitation on the vilification of immigrants, particularly Muslims, capitalising on the official promotion of Islamophobia throughout the bogus "war on terror." Days before Joyce's defection, Hanson repeated an earlier stunt of wearing an Islamic burkha into the Senate, as part of her bid to have it banned.

One Nation was active in the right-wing anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine movement, promoted by segments of the establishment as a battering ram to overturn successful public health measures and ensure the "reopening" of the economy so that full corporate profit-making activities could resume. Hanson and One Nation participated in the anti-immigrant March for Australia in August, the largest far-right mobilisation in decades, which the neo-Nazi National Socialist Network played a central role in organising.

One Nation has also closely identified itself with Trump. Last November, Hanson was at Trump's Halloween party at his Mar-a-Lago resort. Also present was Gina Rinehart, the mining mogul who is Australia's wealthiest individual. Rinehart has for some time been calling for the establishment of a Trump-style movement in Australia.

She has financially backed more right-wing elements of the Coalition, with her Hancock Prospecting Ltd. donating \$A500,000 to Coalition entities in the 2023-24 financial year. Rinehart supported the Coalition's campaign for the May federal election, in which Liberal leader Peter Dutton floated several Trumpian policies, such as mass public sector job cuts and the establishment of a domestic nuclear power industry. The association of the Coalition with Trump played a central role in its rout.

The obvious question is whether Rinehart and other right-wing ruling-class figures are looking around for a new formation, in the wake of the Coalition's defeat. Hanson has previously met with Rinehart and in 2024 she was the guest of honour at a One Nation fundraiser for its effort in that year's Queensland election.

The longstanding descriptions of Joyce as a "maverick" or even an "agrarian socialist" serve to cover the reality that over the course of his political career, he has acted as a determined

representative of specific corporate interests, particularly agribusiness and the fossil fuel companies.

When Joyce left the Senate and sought a House of Representatives seat at the 2013 election, Rinehart funded his campaign to the tune of \$50,000. A controversy erupted in 2017 when Rinehart bestowed Joyce, then deputy prime minister, with a "champion of farming" award and provided him with \$40,000. Amid denunciations for having too close a relationship with the mining mogul, Joyce returned the money.

Notably, and unusually, Hanson's statement welcoming Joyce to One Nation was posted on the website of Hancock Prospecting.

Whatever emerges out of the crisis of the Coalition, whether it be One Nation or another formation, Joyce's defection is a warning that sections of the political and media establishment are setting about developing a far-right formation.

As the May federal election showed, there is mass hostility to Trump and the far-right agenda that he personifies.

Far-right forces, however, are given continuous succour, above all by the Labor government and its affiliated trade union bureaucracy. Labor is spearheading a campaign against refugees and immigrants, including demonising them for all elements of a social crisis caused by its own pro-business policies, in rhetoric very similar to that of Joyce and One Nation. At the same time, by inflicting austerity, Labor is creating the discontent to which the far-right appeals.

The only way to defeat the lurch to the right is to build a socialist movement of the working class, independent of and opposed to the entire political establishment. Such a movement must defend immigrants and refugees, oppose the relentless promotion of nationalist militarism and fight for the abolition of the capitalist system itself, which amid a global breakdown is returning to all the filth and the horrors of the 1930s and 40s.



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