

Coalition leader's speech: Australian ruling elite turns to anti-immigrant poison

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On Tuesday, in his first major policy address since taking over the leadership of the decimated Liberal-National Coalition in February, the parliamentary opposition leader Angus Taylor produced a witch-hunting anti-immigrant diatribe.

Taylor declared the necessity to “reduce immigration numbers drastically,” supposedly to “protect our way of life” and to “restore Australians’ standard of living.” But he did not stop there.

Taylor said the door had been opened to people who had no allegiance to Australia and were “actively working against our nation.” They had “subversive intent.”

The Coalition leader called for the reversal of the nominally non-discriminatory immigration program that has existed since the formal end of the blatantly racist White Australia regime in the 1960s.

There must be discrimination against people from countries designated as not being “liberal democracies” and who therefore could not accept “Australian values,” Taylor said. This would include the introduction of Trump administration-style vetting and deportation measures against “radicals.”

Taylor declared that the existing “Australian values” test for citizenship must become legally binding and extended to visa holders, including making it a compulsory requirement for permanent residents to learn English.

Anyone failing to uphold “core values” outlined in a government statement, including “respect for the rule of law” and English as the national language, would face removal from the country.

Echoing the inflammatory rhetoric of the Trump administration and far-right movements across Europe, such as Nigel Farage’s Reform UK, Taylor blamed migrants for the “erosion of national culture and the Balkanisation of communities.”

The first target for deportation would be what Taylor described as the “Gazan cohort of 1,700 people” granted temporary visas to flee the Israeli genocide after being vetted by the political police of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). They were “a high-risk to our nation” and must be “re-assessed entirely,” he decreed.

Taylor’s speech, and its response in the media and political establishment, marks a further lurch to the right by the ruling

class as a whole—not just the Coalition—to attempt to whip up nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment to split and divide the working class by falsely blaming immigrants for the intensifying cost-of-living crisis, now being fuelled by the barbaric US-Israeli war on Iran.

This shift has far-reaching political implications in Australia, where more than half the population was born overseas or has at least one immigrant parent, and where this is reflected in every factory and workplace, showing the increasingly international character of the working class on a world scale.

Taylor’s hard-line tirade and proposals are an obvious bid to win back a substantial part of the Coalition’s shattered voting base from the far-right anti-immigrant One Nation of Senator Pauline Hanson. But they spell a wider lurch, including by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese’s Labor government. Editorials in the corporate media welcomed his speech and government ministers rushed to declare that they were already cracking down on immigrants.

Yesterday’s *Australian Financial Review* editorial insisted that Taylor’s incendiary remarks “should be assessed as part of an important conversation.” The Murdoch media’s flagship, the *Australian*, welcomed Taylor’s proclamation that: “For an immigration program to work in the national interest, it must discriminate based on values.”

Several Labor government ministers dismissed Taylor’s speech as “desperate dog-whistling” and a political ploy to compete with One Nation. Yet they simultaneously spoke of already having moved in the same direction. Assistant Immigration Minister Matt Thistlethwaite reiterated that migrants must uphold Australian principles, and the current system included “robust” security and values screening.

In fact, the Albanese government is competing with the Coalition and One Nation in scapegoating immigrants. This has included slashing intake numbers of immigrants, refugees and international students, barring entry to Iranians holding tourist visas, reopening the immigration detention camp on the remote Pacific island of Nauru and forcibly transporting former immigration detainees to languish there indefinitely.

The Labor government also has prevented the return home of 11 women and 23 children—all Australian citizens with valid passports—who have been detained in primitive concentration

camps in Syria since 2019.

In his speech, Taylor gave few concrete details but pointed to the adoption of a blacklist of countries from which immigrants would be barred. “Those who migrate from liberal democracies have a greater likelihood of subscribing to Australian values compared to those migrating from places ruled by fundamentalists, extremists and dictators,” he said.

These proscribed places would include Gaza, Taylor specified, but he made no such mention of the many dictatorships backed by the US and its allies, including Australia, such as the Saudi and Gulf state monarchies and General Sisi’s regime in Egypt.

In line with the Trump administration’s mass deportations and violent Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations, Taylor pledged to establish a new Joint Agency Taskforce, including ASIO, the Australian Border Force and the Australian Federal Police, to track down, arrest and deport non-citizens who are still pursuing legal appeals to stay in the country. That would include 65,000 people the Coalition says should be forced to leave Australia immediately.

With a stronger Australian Values rulebook, moreover, there would be “no more ambiguity in courts and tribunals” and no “appeals merry-go-round.” If a visa holder did not “respect our core values, they will be booted out of Australia.”

Legal aid funding for visa holders would be restricted, and non-citizens would be denied access to social and health services, as well as housing programs.

In addition, anyone applying for a visa, even a tourist, would have to submit their social media accounts and hand over their phones on arrival for political vetting, like the regime put in place by US President Trump.

Taylor openly called for the overturning of the right to seek asylum, even in the limited form set out in the 1951 international Refugee Convention. A new “safe country list” would be introduced, to fast-track refusals for asylum claims from countries deemed safe to return to. The list would be based on a similar one used by the Starmer Labour government in the UK.

“To those who say we will be in breach of the Refugee Convention, we will decide who deserves protection and the circumstances in which that protection is granted,” Taylor stated.

This anti-immigrant plan recalls the White Australia policy, adopted and long championed by the Labor Party and the trade unions, which thinly disguised its skin colour ban by implementing a language test. It was a means of trying to keep workers in Australia divided from their fellow workers in Asia and globally.

While Taylor claimed that his proposals would not discriminate on race, religion or faith, he singled out Muslims, referring to “Islamist extremists” and “radical Islamic preachers espousing hate with impunity.”

A central axis of Taylor’s speech was the conflation—shared

by the Labor government—of anti-genocide dissent with antisemitism. Turning reality totally on its head, he referred to the mass protests against the US-backed Israeli annihilation of Gaza as “genocidal marches in major cities.”

Taylor claimed that the December 14 mass shootings at Sydney’s Bondi Beach, by two alleged Islamic State supporters, resulted from the existing immigration policy—effectively blaming immigrants for the terrorist attack.

Hanson, the One Nation founder and leader, is setting the pace, as are far-right formations in Europe and America. She claimed credit for Taylor’s announcement, saying the Coalition was trying to reverse the collapse of its support, displayed in the sharp rise in One Nation’s vote in the recent South Australian state election. Backed by oligarchs such as mining magnate Gina Rinehart, Hanson is paving the road for the rest of the parliamentary establishment, blaming immigrants for the intensifying social and housing crisis.

This is part of a poisonous global drive. In Europe, North America and around the world, the ruling capitalist class is seeking to whip up anti-immigrant sentiment, nationalism and patriotism to divide the international working class, under conditions of plunging living standards, ever-deepening social inequality and a spiral into war. Above all, governments need immigrant scapegoats to prevent workers from mounting a unified challenge to the root cause of these problems—the domination of society by an oligarchy of billionaires.

To defeat this, workers and young people must defend the basic democratic rights of immigrants, international students and refugees, including to live and work where they choose, with full social and citizenship entitlements. This is an essential component of the fight to build a unified mass movement of the working class worldwide against capitalism and for the establishment of workers’ power and socialism to reorganise society on the basis of social and human need, not corporate profit.



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