

One Nation leader delivers racist, pro-business rant at Australian press club

Oscar Grenfell
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One Nation leader Pauline Hanson's speech at the National Press Club (NPC) yesterday was a marker of the degraded character of the political and media establishment as a whole.

For close to an hour, Hanson ranted and raved against immigrants, Muslims and transgender people at one of the country's supposedly preeminent forums of public discussion, whose events are televised by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

Hanson boasted that she has not changed over the past thirty years. That is true. She remains an unreconstructed racist, trading on the demonisation of minority groups and a low-grade populist rhetoric.

What has changed is that amid a crisis of the two-party set-up, sections of the ruling elite and their mouthpieces in the press are boosting One Nation as they ponder whether it may be the political vehicle through which the program of austerity and war can best be advanced.

Hanson's elevation is a marker of not only the crisis of Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition, but how far they have both shifted to the right, normalising anti-immigrant xenophobia and frothing nationalism.

In the days leading up to the address, the entire media treated it as a major event. Breathless articles across the press noted that it was the first time Hanson had spoken at the NPC in thirty years and wondered with excited anticipation what she would say, as though there were any great mystery.

As everyone knew she would, Hanson blamed immigrants for all social ills. The housing crisis, she asserted, was due to too many foreign nationals being permitted to enter the country. The reality that the housing affordability crisis is the result of rampant speculation and the dominance of the sector by wealthy property developers, Hanson did not mention.

Hanson rattled off figures showing growing social distress, including poverty and food insecurity. Again, the

issue was reduced to immigration.

She connected this to a xenophobic denunciation of multiculturalism, declaring that Australia is a "monocultural nation," based upon "Judeo-Christian values." Hanson frothed at figures showing the number of households that speak languages other than English at home. As though the concept that people could speak more than one language was beyond her limited intellect, Hanson suggested that this entire cohort was incapable of conversing in English.

Muslims were particularly targeted, with Hanson warning that "radical Islam" was among the chief threats to "the West."

When she entered politics in 1996 as a Liberal candidate, Hanson traded on widespread fear-mongering over Asian immigration by the political and media establishment. Her vicious attacks on Muslims now are of the same calibre, with the old demagogue trying to capitalise on the consequences of more than twenty years of the bogus "war on terror" and the official normalisation of Islamophobia.

She denounced nominal and wholly inadequate attempts to address climate change as one of the primary causes of the cost-of-living crisis, without providing any evidence. One Nation, whose most prominent supporter is mining baron and multibillionaire Gina Rinehart, would build new coal-fired power stations, Hanson declared.

The latter section of her speech was a rant about the "transgender insurgency," which had supposedly taken over all arms of the state and the public service. The demonisation of transgender people, a kind of repackaged homophobia, is a central staple of far-right movements internationally. And in Trumpian fashion, Hanson declared that she would abolish the publicly subsidised Special Broadcasting Service, which features multilingual broadcasting and would severely curtail the ABC.

Hanson was permitted to speak far beyond the time

normally allotted at the NPC, in a transparent attempt to limit the number of questions she would have to field. The assembled journalists, when they eventually got their chance, were respectful towards Hanson, as though they had just listened to a reasoned speech, rather than the unhinged rant that she actually delivered.

Elements of the question period were nevertheless revealing. As the corporate elite sizes up One Nation and considers whether to throw its support behind Hanson's outfit, its mouthpieces have increasingly raised the question of what policies One Nation advances. The organisation's website features only a handful.

While such questions are posed from the standpoint of whether One Nation can be a trusted pair of hands for the ruling elite, they expose how threadbare and bogus the organisation's populist pitch is.

One journalist asked Hanson how One Nation could posture as a party of "battlers" when it opposed any, even nominal, increases to the minimum wage, under conditions where the majority of workers have experienced real pay cuts over the years-long cost-of-living crisis.

In response, Hanson largely dropped the populist veneer, vaguely acknowledging that people were "doing it tough," but declaring, "You need to look at the other side of the ledger—can businesses afford to pay?"

The real issue was that there were barriers to employers firing people. "Businesses tell me you can't sack people these days," Hanson declared. Seemingly speaking of the entire working class, she declared, "They're on the phones, they don't work, they don't turn up, they actually are lazy."

Asked what One Nation's economic policies would be, Hanson declared there would be a gutting of workplace regulations, to the advantage of business, and whole areas of government spending on social programs would be shut down.

Stripped of the phony demagogy, the entirety of One Nation's program is to carry out a massive assault on immigrants, who constitute a major component of the working class; to drive down wages and working conditions even further; to boost the profits of the corporations; and to implement the austerity measures demanded by the financial markets. Hanson has literally not outlined a single policy to address any of the social ills she cynically invokes.

The reactionary, pro-business character of One Nation's program is why the organisation is being supported by some of the more aggressive sections of the corporate

elite, such as mining baron Rinehart, the country's richest individual. Rinehart has previously demanded that Australian workers compete with those in oppressed regions such as Africa earning \$2 a day.

Under those conditions, the ability of One Nation to make any populist appeal at all is an indictment of Labor, the corporatised union bureaucracy and the Greens. The Labor government is carrying out a program that Hanson largely agrees with, including spending vast sums on the military in preparation for war, attacking immigrants and refugees and carrying out major austerity measures, including the dismantling of disability services. The Greens, whatever their occasional posturing, function as a de facto partner of Labor and continually appeal to it for greater collaboration.

The union bureaucracy has, over the past forty years, functioned as the most ruthless enforcer of the corporate elite's drive to slash jobs, wages and conditions. The unions have imposed one sellout agreement after another, while doing everything they can to suppress the class struggle.

It is only under those conditions that an outfit such as One Nation can appeal to social discontent.

The response of Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to Hanson's speech underscored the extent to which the major parties are opening the door for One Nation. Albanese would not directly criticise the far-right tirade, claiming not to have watched it.

Instead, he denounced a protest stunt by the Get Up organisation, which arranged for a banner to appear behind Hanson, pointing to her hostility to pay rises for workers. That was "counterproductive" Albanese said, before declaring: "I think that people should be allowed to go to the National Press Club and address the Press Club with whatever views people have in a respectful manner, and that should be treated respectfully."

While the political establishment "respectfully" discusses One Nation's fascistic program for an even greater onslaught on social and democratic rights than is already occurring, the critical task for the working class is to build its own independent movement in opposition to the ruling elite and all its representatives, from Labor to the Coalition and the far right.



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