

Australia: Karl Stefanovic's turn from breakfast compere to the far-right

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Longstanding Channel Nine breakfast anchor Karl Stefanovic's rapid transformation from "jovial presenter" to the frontman of an increasingly right-wing podcast is neither an aberration nor merely a cynical bid for clicks and sponsorship. It is a sharp expression of a definite political trajectory within the Australian media and the ruling elite: the conscious cultivation of reactionary narratives aimed at criminalising protest, silencing opposition to imperialist war and genocide, and rehabilitating militarism and state violence.

Stefanovic launched "The Karl Stefanovic Show" as an "independent" podcast in early 2026, promoting it as a space where he could "get curious" and deploy his "bullshit meter" away from the formal constraints of breakfast television. The fact that he was simultaneously the face of the "Today" show, earning a salary of more than \$2 million annually, did not appear to be a constraint on either him or his employer, the Nine Network—at least not for the first several months.

While the podcast emerged in the immediate aftermath of the December 2025 Bondi Beach terror attack, it was only one example of a rightward shift underway among sections of the ruling class and the media in response to the crisis of rule gripping the Australian political establishment, most sharply expressed in the crisis of the Liberal-National Coalition.

Labor's answer to the terrorist shootings at the Jewish Hanukkah celebration, which killed 15 people, was to exploit the shock of the population to rush through legislation that equated opposition to the genocide in Gaza with antisemitism. The aim was to illegalise protest, freedom of speech and to enable the banning of some political organisations.

The collapse of the Coalition parties, evident in the 2025 election, has seen its vote slump to its lowest level since its founding in 1944. The beneficiary of that collapse, however, was not Labor, which is increasingly rejected by its working-class base, a consequence of policies imposed alongside attacks on democratic rights that have resulted in the greatest

reversal of workers' social conditions since WWII.

This has given rise to the right-wing populist One Nation, based on anti-immigration, the gutting of government expenditure and increased exploitation of the working class. While its main base is disgruntled former supporters of the Liberals and Nationals, layers of workers who once voted Labor, are now mistakenly turning to One Nation as an "anti-establishment" response. Far from anti-establishment, the bankrolling of One Nation by Gina Rinehart, Australia's richest individual, highlights that it is an attempt to create in Australia a version of Nigel Farage's Reform and echoes of Trump's policies in the US.

According to co-founder and producer Keshnee Kemp, Stefanovic's podcast is explicitly marketed as filling "a gaping hole in the Australian market" by targeting an underserved male audience. This is a well-worn path of the contemporary far right: exploit the alienation, economic insecurity and destruction of stable working-class life produced by capitalism, and divert it into a pseudo-anti-establishment posture that takes class anger and channels it into reactionary scapegoating—dividing workers along national, ethnic and religious lines.

This process is by no means an Australian phenomenon. It has been spearheaded in the United States by Joe Rogan and other "shock jock" media personalities who have played a central role in shifting the political narrative to the far-right—in defence of Trump's wars abroad and on the working class at home.

Stefanovic's selection of guests reinforces this orientation. The premiere live episode featured One Nation's Pauline Hanson; subsequent shows have centred on figures such as former Nationals turned One Nation leader Barnaby Joyce, Gerard Rennick, former Liberal Party prime minister Tony Abbott, Nationals MP Jacinta Price and other hard-right or nationalist politicians.

Once a frontman for the federal government's 2021 COVID-19 vaccination campaign, Stefanovic's foray into right-wing podcasting has coincided with his public disavowal of that stance. In podcast interviews and social

media clips, he declares “deep regret” about receiving the COVID jab himself and states that “to mandate someone to get a vaccine... is inherently wrong.” Stefanovic has apologised for “not questioning the science.”

That Stefanovic has embraced the “let it rip” policy of state and federal governments, along with the far-right and reactionary forces who coalesced in opposition to lockdowns, masking and vaccination programs, places him at one with the positions not only of One Nation and the Liberal-National Coalition, but also of the extreme right-wing and fascist layers.

In December 2021, the Labor-dominated “National Cabinet” joined forces with the Morrison Coalition government to welcome the Omicron strain of COVID-19 into the country—with NSW Health Minister Brad Hazzard declaring that “pretty well everybody... at some point will get Omicron.”

According to the Actuaries Institute’s COVID-19 Mortality Working Group, there were nearly 20,000 more deaths in 2022 than would have been expected if the pandemic had not happened, with the final figure estimated at 25,000—a 12–15 percent rise in excess deaths, ten times the normal annual fluctuation. More people died from COVID-19 in the first 28 weeks of the Albanese Labor government than in over two years under Morrison—a damning indictment of the entire political establishment’s subordination of human life to the demands of capital.

Stefanovic’s defence of former SAS corporal Ben Roberts-Smith, arrested in April for alleged war crimes committed while serving in the Australian armed forces in Afghanistan, is at one with what is now a litmus test for the right wing. Roberts-Smith was charged with five counts of the war crime of murder, stemming from allegations relating to the deaths of unarmed Afghan detainees during his deployment between 2009 and 2012. In one incident, Roberts-Smith is alleged to have machine-gunned a disabled Afghan prisoner to death; in another, to have kicked an Afghan villager off a cliff before directing a fellow soldier to execute him.

Stefanovic headlined an episode, “How do you judge war in a courtroom—15 years later? In the course of interviewing Roberts-Smith’s supporters, Stefanovic lamented that “I don’t know how anyone can now go and fight for us in the SAS or in any department of the defence force without the thought in the back of your mind that you’re not necessarily going to be protected.”

The Nuremberg Trials following World War II established not merely that courts *can* judge war crimes, but that they *must*—and that “following orders” and “the fog of war” provide no defence against accountability for atrocities. Stefanovic’s framing is meant to serve as a green light to imperialist slaughter without restrictions, constructing the

military as an institution that should be above the law.

However, the clearest indicator of Stefanovic’s ideological trajectory is his June 2026 episode with UK far-right activist Tommy Robinson. Robinson is a fascist — the founder of the English Defence League and a provocateur who whips up race hatred against Muslims and asylum seekers to divide the working class.

In a promotional clip, Stefanovic is seen arm-in-arm with Robinson on a London street, describing him as “the ultimate disruptor,” advertising an hour-long interview that gave Robinson largely unchallenged airtime for his attacks on immigrants and Muslims. Stefanovic praised Robinson’s “tenacity” and “courage... in trying to stand up for what you believe is right,” and engaged in speculative discussion of how “the right” can “seize power.”

The program was taken down the next day after objections from Nine. But the deeper significance lies in the fact that Nine tolerated and promoted Stefanovic’s right-wing podcast for months before drawing a line at Robinson, whose international profile as a far-right extremist made the reputational and advertiser risks too obvious to ignore.

In other words, the corporate break was not with the right-wing trajectory as such. It was a tactical move to distance the network from one highly toxic figure, while continuing to function as a platform for militarist narratives, anti-China and pro-US coverage, and relentless attacks on protesters and youth.

Stefanovic’s trajectory—from highly paid, comfortable breakfast-TV host to defender of war crimes and promoter of Hanson and Robinson, to his ultimate dismissal—shows that layers of the media and ruling elite are consciously cultivating a right-wing narrative to contain, deflect and ultimately suppress the growing anger in society. The working class must build its own independent political movement, based on a socialist and internationalist program, to fight the drive to authoritarianism and war.



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