Victorian election: One Nation exploits social anger to advance big business agenda

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The November Victorian state election is revealing and deepening a profound crisis of Australia's political establishment.

A Newspoll published on October 26 put the governing Labor Party on just 24 percent, the Liberal-National Coalition on 33 percent and far-right One Nation on 20 percent of first-preference votes. A subsequent Roy Morgan poll placed One Nation at 22 percent, almost level with Labor on 22.5 percent.

Long a marginal political force, One Nation is now being discussed as a potential participant in government or holder of the balance of power. The prospect of a far-right party entering government—something without precedent in recent Australian history—has provoked shock and concern among many workers and young people. How has this come to pass?

One Nation's rise is an expression of a national crisis of the two-party system—itself a manifestation of the global breakdown of capitalism. The party's support has surged in federal polling, amid the disintegration of the Liberal-National Coalition over the past year and widespread opposition to Labor.

One Nation exploits immense social anger over the cost-of-living crisis, unaffordable housing, deteriorating public services and the destruction of secure jobs. It fraudulently presents itself as the champion of ordinary people against a discredited political establishment, while blaming immigrants and welfare recipients for conditions created by decades of pro-business policies that One Nation itself supports and pledges to deepen.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) insists that the primary responsibility for One Nation's rise rests with Labor and the trade union bureaucracies. They have played a central role both in creating the social crisis it exploits and cultivating the reactionary political environment in which it has come to prominence.

The Labor-union Accords of the 1980s and 1990s enforced wage-cutting, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs and the restructuring of industry in the interests of big business. Successive Labor governments have continued this offensive, presiding over the deterioration of public healthcare, education, housing and other essential services.

Victoria is a damning indictment of Labor's decades-long rule. In government for 33 of the past 44 years, including the last 13 consecutively, Labor has subordinated every aspect of social and economic life to the demands of big business.

Housing has become unaffordable for growing numbers of workers, public hospitals and schools are in crisis, and essential services are being starved of resources. Far from addressing this social disaster, Labor is preparing an even deeper assault, with more than $4 billion in austerity measures, public-sector job cuts and wage restraint.

Workers have repeatedly entered into struggle against this offensive, only to confront the Labor government and trade union bureaucracies working to suppress their opposition. This year, tens of thousands of Victorian teachers and school staff struck against intolerable workloads and declining real wages, twice rejecting agreements pushed by the Australian Education Union. The union bureaucracy ultimately imposed a deal preserving these conditions and barring further strikes until 2030.

Through such betrayals, the union leaderships have sought to block the emergence of an independent movement of the working class against Labor's pro-business agenda, helping create the political vacuum One Nation is seeking to exploit.

The Liberal-National Coalition is also breaking apart. Its traditional middle-class base has been eroded by decades of economic restructuring and growing inequality. Sections of its affluent urban constituency have shifted to the Teal independents, while other layers are turning towards One Nation, joined by former Coalition figures such as Barnaby Joyce.

One Nation is partly a product of the disintegration and rightward movement of the traditional conservative parties, which have long promoted attacks on refugees, immigrants and welfare recipients, along with punitive law-and-order measures.

But Labor has itself played a leading role in legitimising this reactionary agenda. Labor governments introduced mandatory immigration detention and established the foundations of offshore detention in line with Labor's historical role as the party of "White Australia" chauvinism.

The Albanese government has intensified this offensive. In September, Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke announced the recruitment of another 100 Border Force officers, hundreds of additional detention places and plans to convert a former Melbourne quarantine facility into a mass detention centre. Thousands of immigrant workers face the threat of detention and deportation in a program that will involve the mass raids of the Trump administration targeting the entire working class.

Labor is spearheading an escalating anti-immigrant bidding war with the Coalition and One Nation. All three seek to divert mounting anger over the housing crisis, falling living standards and deteriorating public services away from the capitalist policies responsible and against immigrants and refugees. Far from

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combating One Nation, Labor's promotion of nationalism and anti-immigrant scapegoating legitimises its reactionary agenda and creates the political conditions for its further growth.

The same rightward shift is bound up with the escalating drive to war. The Albanese government has backed the NATO war against Russa in Ukraine, Israel's genocide in Gaza and the utterly criminal US assault on Iran, while committing hundreds of billions of dollars to AUKUS and preparations for US-led war against China. Simultaneously, Labor is imposing tens of billions of dollars in cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Labor's militarism is accompanied by nationalism and the expansion of police and national-security powers, including measures directed against opposition to the Gaza genocide, creating an increasingly authoritarian political climate in which far-right forces can advance.

One Nation fully supports this agenda. It seeks a direct role in government to accelerate the drive to militarism, austerity and state repression, while intensifying nationalist and anti-immigrant agitation.

Its Victorian platform proposes cuts to public agencies and jobs alongside expanded policing. Victorian leader Warren Pickering has called for recruiting police from military veterans, while the party would lower the age of criminal responsibility to 10 and prosecute children accused of serious violent offences as adults.

Its national program proposes reducing temporary migrants and people without valid visas by more than 750,000 over three years, alongside attacks on welfare expenditure and disability support. One Nation has declared that workers have too many rights and has pledged to intensify deregulation as the spearhead of a massive onslaught on wages and conditions.

One Nation's substantial financial backing exposes the class interests behind its populist posturing. Mining billionaire Gina Rinehart has provided support, including an aircraft worth around $1 million. Hancock Agriculture chief executive Adam Giles and Hancock Energy executive director Ian Plimer each donated $500,000, while stockbroker Angus Aitken and his wife Sarah contributed another $1 million.

Amid the disintegration of the established parties, sections of the capitalist class are cultivating the far right as a means of imposing their agenda through increasingly authoritarian methods.

This is part of an international process, expressed in the rise of Donald Trump in the United States, Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Javier Milei in Argentina and the far-right Alternative for Germany. In late 2025, Rinehart flew Hanson to Florida aboard her private jet, where Hanson attended Trump's Halloween party and addressed a conservative conference at Mar-a-Lago.

Whether One Nation enters government, holds the balance of power or remains outside the parliamentary arrangements formed after November 28, the danger posed by the far right will not disappear. Whatever the composition of the next Victorian government, the assault on public spending, jobs and working-class living standards will intensify, alongside the drive to war.

The central question is what political perspective is required to combat this program, of which the growth of One Nation is one expression.

The pseudo-left Victorian Socialists (VS), an electoral front of Socialist Alternative, claims that electing its candidates to parliament offers a means of combating One Nation. In reality, its paltry reformist program seeks to channel workers and young people back behind the very political establishment that is lurching ever further to the right and has created the conditions for One Nation's rise.

By promoting illusions in parliamentary reform and the trade union bureaucracies, VS works to obstruct the development of an independent movement of the working class, thereby strengthening the conditions exploited by the far right.

At Socialist Alternative's April conference, leading member Mick Armstrong branded One Nation voters "racist scum." Such denunciations write off sections of workers whose social anger is being exploited by the far right, while obscuring the responsibility of Labor, the Coalition and the union bureaucracies for creating the conditions of its rise.

The alternative advanced by the SEP is the independent political mobilisation of the working class against the program of war, austerity and authoritarianism supported by the entire political establishment, including One Nation. The SEP calls for rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies, to unite workers across industries and national borders in opposition to the capitalist offensive.

These struggles require an international socialist perspective. The resurgence of the far right, escalating wars and attacks on democratic rights are interconnected expressions of the crisis of capitalism.

The SEP fights to build an international movement uniting workers across national, ethnic and religious divisions, in opposition to the outmoded capitalist nation-state system. It upholds the right of all workers to live and work wherever they choose, with full citizenship and democratic rights.

The SEP fights for workers' governments and the socialist reorganisation of economic life, placing the banks and major corporations under public ownership and democratic workers' control to meet social needs rather than private profit and war.

In Northern Metropolitan, the upper-house electorate covering Melbourne's industrial north, the SEP is standing Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne. The unity of workers of every nationality and background, in Australia and internationally, provides the basis for defeating the program of war, austerity and authoritarianism advanced by the political establishment, including the far right.

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