Liberal–One Nation preference deal advances far right's integration into Australian politics

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Victorian Liberal leader Jess Wilson confirmed a preference arrangement with the anti-immigrant One Nation party in the state election that is being held on November 28.

The announcement has significance far beyond Victoria. Amid a deepening crisis of the two-party system, it marks a further step in the integration of the far right into official Australian politics, raising the prospect of One Nation playing a role in the formation or functioning of government.

Sections of the ruling elite are turning to the far right to divert mounting anger over the cost-of-living crisis, declining living standards and the record of successive Labor and Coalition governments into reactionary channels. Behind its anti-establishment posturing, One Nation is a thoroughly pro-business party that scapegoats immigrants for the social crisis while supporting the austerity and militarism of the major parties.

Wilson justified the decision as necessary to defeat the deeply unpopular state Labor government. She declared that the Coalition would place Labor and the Greens at the bottom of its how-to-vote tickets, with other parties, including One Nation, above them.

The Liberal leader ruled out any formal agreement to govern with One Nation. She also indicated that exceptions to the preference arrangement could be made for individual candidates expressing objectionable views.

Both qualifications had the character of public relations disclaimers, far less significant than the preference arrangement itself.

The same argument Wilson advanced for the preference arrangement—that it was necessary to defeat Labor—could readily be invoked in the event of a hung parliament to justify forming a coalition with One Nation or relying on its support to establish a minority government.

As for the exemption clause for specific candidates, that was both a tacit admission of the reality that One Nation's core includes fascistic individuals and an attempt to distance the Liberals from them, while proceeding with the preference agreement.

The very day that Wilson made the announcement, One Nation disendorsed Franco Guardiani, its candidate for the seat of Preston in Melbourne, after the *Guardian* published old social media posts in which he appeared to describe Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler as "the goat [greatest of all time]."

The existence of fascistic forces within One Nation is no doubt wider. On social media, former members of the proscribed National Socialist Network, an avowedly neo-Nazi organisation, have been promoting One Nation, with some of them claiming to be members.

One Nation leader Pauline Hanson has dismissed reports of such elements within her party's ranks, branding them as "infiltrators' and asserting tightened vetting procedures. There is, however, a very obvious connection between the line of openly fascistic forces, centred on xenophobia, and One Nation's identity as the most aggressively anti-immigrant of the official parties.

To the extent that there has been scrutiny of One Nation's extreme-right connections in the mainstream media, that has reflected concerns among segments of the ruling class that the rise of the far-right party could further undermine the two-party system.

Because it makes a fraudulent appeal to diffuse discontent, One Nation is an inherently unstable formation, reflected in the motley character of its candidates. Along with reports of fascistic elements, corporate media articles have pointed to alleged links between some One Nation candidates and officials and seamy business operations, as well as criminal records.

Other sections of the ruling elite, however, most notably Australia's wealthiest individual, the mining magnate Gina Rinehart, are aggressively promoting One Nation as a vehicle for deepening the agenda of austerity and war.

Notwithstanding the tactical wrangling and the uncertainty of layers of the establishment as to whether One Nation can be a trusted pair of hands, the Liberal deal shows that the logic of the situation, amid the breakdown of the two-party system, is the elevation of this far-right formation.

The extent of that breakdown was underscored by Resolve

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polling published by the *Age* on Tuesday. It put Labor's primary vote in Victoria at just 22 percent, behind One Nation on 23 percent and the Liberal–National Coalition on 30 percent.

The poll underscored the depth of Labor's discrediting. Premier Ben Carroll's net approval rating had fallen to minus 16, compared with plus 24 for Liberal leader Wilson.

Labor has governed Victoria for 33 of the past 44 years, including the past 13 consecutively. Over that period, it has spearheaded a pro-business program involving privatisation and the gutting of essential services, leading to a massive crisis of public health and education.

Victorian Labor has forced ordinary people to bear the brunt of the cost-of-living crisis, in line with the program of its federal counterpart, including by pushing real wage cuts in the public sector and rejecting any relief amid widespread rental and mortgage stress, while protecting the profits of the banks and corporations.

Together with the union bureaucracy, it has sought to suppress any struggle by the working class against this agenda, including through the use of draconian industrial relations laws.

That is a microcosm of how Labor and the union bureaucracy have facilitated One Nation's rise nationally, by inflicting the social misery that it seeks to exploit with a fraudulent populist appeal.

Victoria also underscores the extent to which One Nation, Labor and the Liberals are all committed to the same basic agenda. All of them have pledged that if they are elected, they will carry out sweeping cuts to social spending to force the working class to pay for the debt crisis, which is sharper in Victoria than any other state.

At the federal level too, there are no fundamental differences between Labor and One Nation. Labor, a party founded on the xenophobic "White Australia" program, is continuing to spearhead an assault on immigrants, while demonising them for the cost-of-living and housing crisis caused by its own pro-business policies.

Labor, the Liberals and One Nation are in a bidding war as to which is best placed to intensify this onslaught, with all outlining plans for mass deportations that would inevitably involve ICE-style raids threatening the democratic rights of the entire population. That is one expression of a broader assault on the entire working class, including the $63.7 billion in cuts to social spending contained in the federal budget, centred on kicking hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people off the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Labor's central policy, moreover, of supporting US-led militarism globally, in league with the fascistic Trump administration, is fully supported by One Nation. Labor is completing Australia's transformation into a frontline state for a catastrophic US-led war against China, while supporting the US-Israeli genocide of the Palestinians, the utterly criminal assault on Iran and the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine.

As in Europe and the US, the rise of the far-right One Nation is one expression of a lurch to the right by the entire political establishment, in response to the enormous crisis of global capitalism.

The conditions that have given rise to the prospect of One Nation entering government exist federally and in all of the states, including the largest, New South Wales, where an election is due to be held early next year. The deal in Victoria creates a precedent for similar arrangements in those elections, including the next federal election.

It signals that while the rise of One Nation has roiled them, the major parties are willing to collaborate with the far-right outfit, because they all share the same basic program of war, austerity and authoritarianism.

The key lesson for workers and young people is that the fight against this program requires a break with the entire political establishment. The lie peddled by the union bureaucracy, the Greens and the pseudo-left Victorian Socialists that Labor is a "lesser-evil" and that the election will resolve anything for workers, only facilitates the tripartite program of reaction, subordinating mass popular opposition to the decrepit parliamentary establishment.

What is required is an independent political movement of the working class, based on a socialist perspective, aimed at establishing workers' power and placing the banks and the corporations under public ownership and democratic control, as part of an international struggle for socialism. The Socialist Equality Party is standing Morgan Peach and Peter Byrne in the Northern Metropolitan Region to take forward the fight to build that movement.

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