

## Senator Fraser Anning and the Smugness of Australian “Values”

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*Be wary of the self-satisfied and morally soothed. The complacent have a habit of giving the game away, glorifying themselves in satisfied satiation. Australia’s parliament seemed to be very self-congratulatory in their condemnation of the newly arrived Senator of the Katter Australia Party, **Fraser Anning**. Last month, the rough, seemingly untutored Anning became the convenient freak show for his fellow parliamentarians; his more seasoned colleagues, versed in the dark arts of hypocrisy, duly rounded on him. How dare he express what many of them have either felt or ignored?*

Anning has volunteered himself as yet another scrounger who played the gargantuan race card, peppering his [inaugural address](#) to the Senate with the dross that has been fairly ordinary in Australian politics. It was meant to have resonances with **Pauline Hanson’s** vulgarly rich delivery in 1996, and it is worth noting the parallels. In the former, there was initial gasp, horror and pondering. What Hanson was saying as the new federal member for Oxley was hardly shocking to **Prime Minister John Howard**.

Hanson’s views struck home with a domestic, comforting fury; her prejudices stirred the blood: suspicions of racial swamping, the nightmare of Asiatic miscegenation were hardly alien to a prime minister who, as opposition leader in the 1980s, felt that Australia was at risk of yellowing. Howard’s rat cunning took hold: use Hanson’s indignation at Big Picture politics and elitism, and also, as best as possible, destroy her.

Anning evidently thought he could ride that same wave. He had been told by KAP advisors that he needed to be controversially relevant. This was not going to be an easy task; Australian politics has assimilated a good deal of intolerance since the late 1990s, and the new senator needed to do something to stand out. But rather than being a savvy racist, he came across as a barking enthusiast who had lost the plot. He quoted Sir Henry Parkes, “Father of our Federation” and his reference to knowing “the value” of Australia’s “British origin”. He believed that there was no “retrograde force” in the world more conspicuous than Muslims. “I believe that the reasons for ending all further Muslim immigration are both compelling and self-evident.”

He wishes for immigration policy to be wrested from government and taken to a plebiscite, the outcome, he hopes, being a return to the White Australia policy. “The final solution to the immigration problem is, of course, a popular vote.” Had Anning avoided those words of finality, his speech would read as anything Hanson has given in the past. Instead, he gave

parliament a red line.

The now deposed **Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull** [described](#) Anning's observations as "appalling". "We are a nation that does not define its nationality, its identity, by reference to race or religion or cultural background or ethnic background." Reference to a "final solution" on immigration was a "shocking insult" to the Jewish people. Opposition leader **Bill Shorten** [considered](#) the Anning performance "repugnant and disgraceful". Even Hanson [felt](#) that the former One Nation member was "appalling", claiming that the speech was "straight from the Goebbels handbook for Nazi Germany". Politicians hugged; tears were shared in unity.

As Australian politicians immerse themselves in orgiastic satisfaction that their country is the tip of the civilised community, a twelve-year old refugee child on Nauru is mounting [a hunger strike](#) against a distinct interpretation of tolerance shown by Australian authorities. "This particular child, like many other children," came the grim [summation](#) of Doctors For Refugees president **Barri Phatarfod**, "has just completely lost hope."

It was Australian values, shorn of substance but obsessively anti-humanitarian, that created multi-tiered levels of refugees and asylum seekers in sneering defiance of the Refugee Convention. Hanson's fear of remorseless Asiatic absorption has shifted: in place of the industrious citizens of Southeast Asia and China have come fears of the theocratic, wailing Mullahs worshipping the Koran and African mobs.

Australia's parliament, in another more accurate depiction of its values, also did itself proud by [passing amendments](#) on asylum legislation to affirm that detaining 1,600 asylum seekers was lawful. (Only three members in the House of Representatives voted against it: Greens MP **Adam Bandt**, and independents **Andrew Wilkie** and **Cathy McGowan**.) The [Migration \(Validation of Port Appointment\) Bill](#) 2018 was given the easiest of passages to the Senate, legitimising the status of "a proclaimed port in the Territory of Ashmore and Cartier Islands". It further seeks to ensure "that things done under the Migration Act 1958 which relied directly or indirectly on the terms of the appointment are valid." Both sides of the aisle want to inoculate themselves against any future litigation, and few tears were shed, or hands held, over that consensus.

What Anning did give to other politicians was an opportunity to be nauseatingly smug, cringingly self-satisfied in having condemned the racial genie long out of the bottle and roaming at will. To that end, he could be condemned as a person who did not share the values of parliament, the, dare one say it, un-Australian representative who had actually expressed views common to many backbenchers. An odd spectacle, given that the Australian parliament will always be characterised by its first gesture: legislating for a White Australia.

Labor's **Senator Penny Wong** herself was also something of a treat in that regard, a fine figure when it comes to shifting values and raising the moral platform. This is a politician who [publicly asserted](#) a stance in her party against same-sex marriage in 2010 (politics is politics), telling the Ten Network that,

"On the issue of marriage, I think the reality is there is a cultural, religious and historical view around that which we have to respect."

This dramatically altered last year, when Wong became ebullient, tear-shedding in the aftermath of amendments to the Marriage Act regarding same-sex marriage.

Now, Wong [presented herself](#) again, as a high priestess of moral worth, seeing in Anning a bête noire worthy of her condemnation. Anning's speech "was not worthy of this Parliament." It "did not reflect the heart of this country. We saw a speech that did not reflect the strong, independent, multicultural, tolerant, accepting nation that we are."

Anning presented a perfect alibi. Australian politicians could speak about "values" and a contingent tolerance that remains vulnerable to erasure and sparing to asylum seekers and refugees (unless they so happen to be white South African farmers). They could extol a non-existent exceptionalism, ignoring the obvious fact that this is a country troubled by race and insecurity, wealthy yet spoiled by it. To take the issue of immigration to a plebiscite would be a truly democratic measure, but many Australian politicians fear the outcome. They might well find that the heart of the country remains soured by a managed paranoia.

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