
Hanson departs but the embers she fanned are still smouldering

Tony Koch
Courier Mail
17 January 2002

The announcement by Pauline Hanson that she was retiring as national president of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party brought a collective sigh from many in Australia, particularly those favouring conservative political philosophies.

Hanson burst on to Australia's political stage in 1996 when she won the federal seat of Oxley as an independent. She had been disendorsed as the official Liberal candidate because of racist views she expressed in newspaper articles. She then came under the guidance (read control) of a gaggle of smarties who realised there was personal gain to be made from associating themselves with this person who was enjoying a quite remarkable level of popularity for her outspoken views.

Hanson's problems were many.

She was unable to distinguish between people who could genuinely assist her to promote her philosophies and the spivs who were using her for their own ends.

She was grandly inexperienced in political, social and worldly matters and was unable to articulate her beliefs when asked for a lucid explanation. But she appealed to a mass audience.

At the 1998 Queensland election, One Nation gained 24 per cent of the primary vote and secured 11 seats in the 89-member parliament. Had they been a little better organised and funded, One Nation at that poll would easily have won another five or six, making them a formidable force. But the candidates who won seats, with a few notable exceptions, were of a similar intellectual ilk to Hanson, and were soon found wanting. Time and again they made fools of themselves with outlandish statements and behaviour.

However, any political party which believes that the resignation of Hanson means the issue of dissatisfaction which spawned the birth of One Nation has also dissipated, is deluded.

The vast majority of people who flocked to One Nation were not fools who deserved only to be scoffed at. They were, in the main, people bypassed by modern government buzzwords such as globalisation, national competition policy, assimilation and enterprise bargaining.

Nobody had bothered to engage them -- to explain what they had to do to get back on the merry-go-round, to become relevant. Many were unemployed or in unskilled occupations whose jobs were either under threat or, in many cases, non-existent.

Consider the thousand or so families in Rockhampton faced with the dole queue because the Kerry Packer-controlled Consolidated Meat abattoir at Lakes Creek has

been closed. If your working day involves standing in white Wellington boots knee-deep in blood and offal, and your only employment skill is using a boning knife, it is difficult to understand why you are suddenly redundant.

HOW has embracing the free market helped that person -- a genuine hard-working Australian eking out a meagre existence in a job few of us covet? That man or woman naturally looks around for somebody to help them -- somebody to blame even -- or at least somebody to explain why they have become the "victims of progress". Hanson, unconsciously I feel, tapped into a vein of discontent the richness of which even she could not comprehend. Nobody did, and it still exists.

Hanson was cunning enough, when advised by the irascible John Pasquarelli, to touch the raw nerve of racism that so excites many Australians who succumb to the evil of downward envy. She correctly identified the shameful waste of billions of dollars thrown at "the Aboriginal problem" -- the government's response to a serious issue that it hoped buckets of money could solve, but has not.

Hanson identified the concerns of people who felt -- rightly in most cases -- that they had been left behind, and she pushed the buttons. Australia, swaddled in its political insecurity, responded in a rash of unhealthy racist upheaval -- a sentiment recognised by John Howard and garnered in the recent Federal campaign when he vowed to "protect Australia's borders" from illegal immigrants.

The task now for Australia's political leaders is seriously to address the issues which alienated so many people.

The National Party's pledge that it is "now listening to the people" is vacuous nonsense. Similarly, for Labor to sit back and rest on the assumption that One Nation voters are an undisciplined lot and therefore they will, as has happened, get many back through second preference votes at the ballot box, is a foolish attitude, fraught with danger.

Hanson may have disappeared from the political landscape, but she lit a fire, the embers of which are still aglow. If anything, the recent business bankruptcies, closures of government services in rural and provincial towns and the subsequent forced unemployment have added to the crowds of disenchanting Australians who feel that nobody speaks for them. Nobody does, because nobody has bothered to listen to and include them.

One Nation is far from dead.