

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: ONE NATION AND NEOLIBERALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

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Much like the Brexit referendum result and Donald Trump's ascendancy to the White House, the revival of Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party's (ONP) 2016 federal election success has rocked Australian politics. With more than fifty-nine thousand first preference votes cast for the ONP group ticket nationally, the party secured 4.29% of the Senate vote, resulting in the election of four ONP senators including Hanson (Australian Electoral Commission, 2016a). Since then, the ONP has become influential in federal politics as the third largest non-government voting bloc in the Senate. At the state level, the ONP may yet repeat its 1998 success in the coming Queensland elections. It had a poor showing in the recent Western Australian election, but this setback can probably be attributed more to State-level issues like the reaction to the ONP/Liberal preference deal in Western Australia, rather than a rejection of the party and its politics.

This article adopts a political economy approach to examine the parallels between ongoing structural changes in the Australian economy and the (re)rise of the ONP in 2016. It has two aims. Firstly, to conceptualise the ONP as a populist radical right party in accordance with Mudde (2007, 2017), demonstrating the way in which the typological features intersect with economic developments. This also allows us to position the analysis within the extensive body of international research literature examining the conditions precipitating the rise of similar political parties in liberal democracies throughout in the West. Secondly, it argues that the ONP phenomenon is an unintended consequence of neoliberal ambitions in

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Australia. The increasing precariousness of the Australian labour market and the deepening of social inequalities in the transition to a service based economy, represent the material conditions which encourage the emergence of a populist radical right party like the ONP. These developments serve to dislocate significant portions of the working-class and threaten the financial security of the lower-middle class, as these socioeconomic groups find their skills increasingly redundant and their employment under increasing pressure.

One Nation as an expression of the populist radical right

The ONP may appear a curious phenomenon, distinct from the 'establishment' Australian Labor Party (ALP) and Liberal-National Coalition. To some extent, the Party demonstrates a synthesis of the defining features of the two: the Coalition's social conservatism and emphasis on the individual and free market, and Labor's former discourses of social solidarity and economic protectionism. Like most populist radical right parties, the ONP does not see itself as populist, or even radical. Instead, the party and its supporters insist they are above politics, representing 'Australian values' and the 'Australian people' (Pauline Hanson's One Nation, 2015c). Under the banner of 'One Nation, One People, One Flag', the Party has promised a return to a golden era of social and economic security (Curran, 2004: 40).

Although more heterogeneous than other party families, the populist radical right is distinguished from the conservative-right (Arzheimer and Carter 2006: 426) on the basis of the more 'radical' policy positions they present, which deviate from the current policy consensus (Rydgren and Ruth, 2011: 207). The precise nature of the radical 'core' remains contentious – Mudde (1996) outlines 26 different approaches to its scholarly definition, including 58 different criteria. In order to avoid this conceptual quagmire, this article adopts Mudde's (2007, 2017) heuristic typology of a populist, radical right defined by the synthesis of three key features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. While these elements may appear in the ideological matrix of other political actors, it is the unique combination of the three that makes a party of the populist radical right (Mudde, 2017: 5). In the case of the ONP, these defining elements can be seen as relating directly to structural change experienced in the Australian political economy.

The ONP's nativism combines nationalism with xenophobia, arguing Australia should be inhabited exclusively by members of the 'native' group ('Australians') while 'non-native' ('Other') elements - whether persons or ideas - are perceived as fundamentally threatening. Their anti-immigration stance, insistence on the incompatible nature of Islam with Australian institutions and preoccupation with a fear of invasion (Hanson, 1996, 2016) constitute their nativist definitional nexus and remain closely tied with neoliberal developments. This is due to the historical interlinking of concepts of multiculturalism and immigration with economic growth and international competitiveness in Australia (Johnson, 1998: 212-213). Immigration, in large part necessitated by neoliberal demands for the free flow of labour, has become tied to the fears over the loss of 'Aussie' jobs (Deutchman, 2000: 57). The concerns regarding increased competitiveness in the job market for 'native' Australian's combine with fears that Australia's social welfare services are stretched thin by the intake of immigrants: 'until we take control of our borders, we will be taken for a soft touch by those who will use and abuse our system however it may suit them' (PHON, 2015a). The ONP's chauvinism is thus more than a concern over 'Aussie culture' and identity. It is fundamentally a response to the stagnating economic position of Australia in the global market.

These concerns intersect closely with the ONP's authoritarianism, understood as a 'belief in a strictly ordered society', in which infringements of authority are to be 'punished severely' (Mudde, 2017: 4). An emphasis on a 'strong state' and particularly border security is central to this and is directly related to neoliberal advances. As the state's capacity 'to influence policy in many areas is eroded by global forces', specifically Australia's integration into the global market, 'control efforts have been concentrated on areas that remain, ostensibly, within the direct control of national lawmakers', namely citizenship and migration law (Dauvergne, 2008: 169). Add to this the ONP's scepticism of supra-national institutions like the United Nations and global financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (Killoran, 2016; PHON, 2015a, 2015b). For the ONP, Australia's sovereignty must be reasserted in order to protect the nation from the 'UN and unaccountable foreign bodies that have interfered [*sic*] and have choked our economy since the federal government handed power to the International Monetary Fund in 1944' (PHON, 2015a).

Mudde understands populism ‘as an *ideology* that considers society to be ultimately separated into two antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’” (Mudde, 2017: 4). However, this interpretation of populism as distinct ideology is problematic. This is because, as (Canovan, 1981) points out, populism does not refer to a specific ideology. Instead, populism is always ‘attached’ to another ideology (Laclau, 2005: 32). As such, the authors adopt a conceptualisation of populism as a discourse or style informed by Laclau (2005, 2006) and more recent scholarship undertaken by Mondon (2013, 2015), Moffitt (2015) and Moffitt and Tormey (2014). Despite this divergence from Mudde’s ideological conceptualisation, the discursive/stylistic interpretation of populism nevertheless remains compatible with Mudde’s overall typology of a populist radical right. It is a discourse built around the populists’ presentation of a dichotomous struggle between an inherently ‘good’ people and a ‘corrupt’ and ‘evil’ Other (Laclau, 2006). By identifying themselves with a ‘people’ or ‘heartland’, populists position themselves as representative of an idealised conception of the community (Taggart, 2003: 6), claiming to speak for the ‘unarticulated opinions, demands and sentiments of the ordinary people’ (Betz and Immerfall, 1998: 4). Such a discourse is characteristic of the ONP. The Party’s venerates ‘common sense’ and claims to speak on behalf of the ‘everyday’ Australian while rejecting a ‘political class’ overrun by ‘vested interests’ (Hanson, 1996, 2016; PHON, 2015c). The ONP’s discourse is distinguished, even in comparison to other populists, by the centrality of its economic themes: its ‘distinctly rural and *producerist* flavour – talk of the return of tariffs, the protection of industry’ (Moffitt, 2017). The ONP’s call for a regeneration of Australian democracy through enhanced popular participation should therefore be seen as an attempt to reassert popular control over economic forces unleashed by neoliberal reform.

Neoliberalism and One Nation

More than just a reaction to an embattled (Anglo-)Australian identity or the result of a racism inherent in the settler-colonial status of Australia, the One Nation phenomenon can be seen as driven in large part by economic factors. While the Party may rely on an anti-immigration discourse stressing the peril in which ‘Aussie culture’ finds itself in order

to mobilise voters, these post-material issues should nevertheless be considered as firmly rooted in material concerns. Their fears over immigration and race do not take place in a vacuum. They are in large part directly motivated by fears over job security, the sustainability of social welfare and the access to government services (Sheppard, 2015), to which the alien Other, be it Muslim or Asian, represents a tangible and immediate threat. The ONP harnesses this material anxiety, articulating the fears of many working and middle-class Australians 'whose will is being ignored by the two party system' (PHON, 2015c) into a potent electoral challenge. In this way, the Party's vision of a 'Fortress Australia' - self-sufficient, homogenous and chauvinistic (Gibson, McAllister and Swenson, 2002: 824) - represents a direct response to the structural changes in Australia's political economy.

In this article, neoliberalism is operationalised through a governmentality approach. This recognises the '*multiple and contradictory aspects* of neoliberal spaces, techniques and subjects' (Larner, 2003: 510), wherein a hybridity of neoliberal and non-neoliberal rationales and techniques are employed simultaneously in order to render programs workable in practice (Higgins, 2014: 163). In this way, while the authors acknowledge there may be tensions and contradictions in Australian economic policy, despite these 'deviations' there has been an 'almost complete policy convergence on neoliberalism' (Bell, 1997: 358). This is supported by 'considerable evidence' for the dominance of neoliberal ideas in economic, political and social domains (Higgins, 2014: 162). This shift toward neoliberal principles in Australia has involved 'ever increasing doses of privatisation, commercialisation, contracting out, user pays, the creation of markets for welfare goods and services and the wholesale importation of private sector management practices into public administration' (Bell, 1997: 358).

Many of these changes to Australia's economy have been accelerated or exacerbated since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC). They bring with them social and cultural implications also important in considering the return of the ONP, by creating new challenges for individuals and their capacity to adapt to new demands, placing 'a premium on cultural capital, individual entrepreneurship, and flexibility' (Betz, 1994: 29). Those who possess these qualities are expected to be 'the winners of post-industrial modernity', while others are left behind (Betz, 1994: 30). Neoliberalism's increased emphasis on higher learning qualifications (Betz, 1994: 28-29, 30-21) is particularly important, given the consistent

over-representation of voters with low-education levels in demographic accounts of the ONP support base (Goot and Watson, 2001b; Marr, 2017; Reid, 2017) and in the populist radical right elsewhere in the West (Arzheimer, 2017: 279, 283-275; Betz, 1994: 153-166; Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 152-162).

The ONP's rise must also be considered as situated in a period where the dominant political and media discourse was one of economic crisis. Australia was in the midst of a 'budget emergency', or so the public was told (Hunter, 2015). While these apocalyptic predictions had reduced in salience by the time of the ONP's election success, the Party continues to play on economic fears with Hanson sounding the budget alarm well into 2016 (Coorey, 2016). Whether there actually 'is' a crisis in an objective sense is beside the point – it is the way a *sense* of crises is used 'to inject an urgency and an importance to their message' that is important (Taggart, 2003: 275). Rather than simply reacting to an external crisis, populist actors like the ONP 'actively perform and perpetuate' a sense of crisis (Moffitt, 2015) as a vital means of mobilising support.

The available data on inequality in Australia reveals crucial class trends. Wealth inequality, measured in terms of income difference and the value of assets owned, has increased markedly since 1970, following the rise of neoliberalism (Sheil and Stilwell, 2016). According to the 2014 Australian Bureau of Statistic (ABS) data, the poorest 20% of Australian households in the lowest quintile receive 7.3% of total income, while those in the highest quintile receive over 40%, a trend that has remained relatively stable for the past 20 years (ABS, 2015). For wealth distribution, the figures are more unequal, with the 10% at the top quintile owning 62% of household wealth, and the bottom quintile holding less than 1% of all household wealth (ABS, 2015). The relationship of these trends with the recent political revival of the ONP are the two widening fault lines, one between the bottom 40% of households and the rest, the other between the next 50% and the 10% at the top (Sheil and Stilwell, 2016). There has been economic pain, as well as social humiliation: the middle class is hollowing out and skilled blue-collar workers are being pushed into lower wage categories (Fletcher and Whip, 2000: 74-75). Both witness their 'economic function increasingly displaced and material and social wellbeing progressively eroded' by 'accelerating industrial and commercial rationalization' (Goodliffe, 2013: 87-88). This data is collected up to the period directly prior to the popular rebirth of the ONP, a period notable for the emergence of a 'new wave' of

populist radical right street movements under the banner of Reclaim Australia (Lyons, 2015; Parnell and Rushton, 2015; The Online Hate Prevention Institute, 2015). Reclaim Australia arguably opened the political space for the new wave of nativist politics, which crystallised in the ONP's return from political obscurity as Hanson returned to the leadership.

Wage growth has declined markedly in the last few years even though labour productivity continues to rise (Jacobs and Rush, 2015: 9). Economic stagnation and decline is an international trend – with wage growth lower than previously forecast for several developed countries (Jacobs and Rush, 2015: 10). However, Australia's economic decline remains significant even within the context of OECD countries in recent years (Jacobs and Rush, 2015: 10). The size of the decline is 'larger than simple historical relationships would suggest', dropping to the slowest pace and longest period of low wage growth since the early 1990s recession (Jacobs and Rush, 2015: 9). The wage price index for December 2015 – December 2016 grew by just 1.9%, a full percentage point lower than the lowest point during the GFC (ABS, 2017b). Average real wages in Australia have not risen for more than three years. September 2016 marked the 16th consecutive fall in the growth of annual wages, falling to a new record low below the 2.1% set in June, 2016 (ABS, 2017b). The ONP argues that this 'shrinking of the economic pie' is directly the fault of 'foreign bodies' like the United Nations and the Other, who've taken jobs away from 'hard-working Australians' (PHON, 2015a).

Following its integration into the globalised economy during the Hawke-Keating era, Australian capital, especially the manufacturing sector, has been exposed to the effects of unregulated labour (and capital) from abroad, particularly in Asia. The effect has left the manufacturing and agriculture sectors threatened by more 'competitive' foreign labour and products, leaving Australian capital to face a challenge in finding 'new sources of growth and productivity in the post-mining boom economy' (Senate Standing Committees on Economics, 2015: 1). The answer, so it would seem, lay in the transition to a new service based economy. By 2015, the service sector accounted for around 80% of employment in Australia and nearly 60% GDP (Bakhtiari *et al.*, 2015: 37).

As finance and other service industry jobs multiply, employment in manufacturing continues to decline (Cahill, 2007: 224; Vandenbroek,

2016). During the second half of the 1980s, the manufacturing industry's share of total employment was over 15% (Kryger, 2014). In 2008, before the GFC, manufacturing was still Australia's largest employer and biggest producer (Senate Standing Committees on Economics, 2015: 1). However, by February 2016, manufacturing employment had reached a record low of just 7.2% (ABS, 2016). This contraction in the manufacturing industry's employment share can be attributed to a number of factors, in particular the increased competition from 'low cost' countries like China and India and a general trend toward 'more capital-intensive production processes' (Georgeson and Harrison, 2015: 5).

The changing industrial composition has the greatest impact on local labour markets, areas where the decline or collapse of manufacturing employment is most prominent. Areas dependent on manufacturing as a source of employment are particularly susceptible to the challenges posed by such rapid change (Georgeson and Harrison, 2015: 2). The growth of the service sector has therefore resulted in the 'breaking of the link between employment and community' (Cahill 2007: 227), with many rural and urban-fringe communities disproportionately affected by the changes in social geography. Rural communities have been particularly hard hit, given the ongoing long-term decline in terms of trade for agricultural goods and the rise of new conflicts regarding foreign investment and 'land grabbing' (Reid, 2017). This reflects 'some of the material underpinnings for the rural backlash against neoliberalism' seen in the ONP (Cahill, 2007: 227-228). As Hanson lamented, 'many of our once prosperous rural areas are now economic wastelands', as the government continues to kowtow 'to financial markets, international organisations, world bankers, investment companies and big business people' (Hanson, 1997: 31).

There are important intersections between these changes in social geography and the return of the ONP. Recent analysis of the ONP vote in Queensland - the historic heartland of ONP support - in the 2016 federal election demonstrated a positive relationship 'between the presence of blue collar workers and the size of the [ONP] vote' (Reid, 2017). This follows earlier demographic analysis of the ONP's voter base (Goot and Watson, 2001a: 514). The relationship between the proportion of the labour force employed in the agricultural sector and support for ONP also appears to suggest, in Queensland at least, a strong correlation between the two, reflecting the party's 'traditional' rural base (Reid, 2017). It is worth mentioning here that, despite the party's image as a 'bush party'

with electoral strongholds outside major cities and large towns (Goot and Watson, 2001: 514), Labor Party research and focus groups indicate strong growth of support for the ONP in electorates on the periphery of urban centres (Marr, 2017: 18).

More broadly, the transition ‘from labour-intensive to capital intensive ‘lean’ production’ (Betz, 1998: 7), undertaken as part of the neoliberal pivot toward the globalised economy, has radically changed the composition of the Australian labour market. New demands leave a rising number of workers without the skills or capacity to adapt to the dominant service sector, or with skills simply obsolete. The post-WW2 ‘Keynesian’ emphasis on industrial growth and full employment has gradually been eroded. Market rationalism has led to the ‘downsizing’ of the labour force in technologically advanced societies like Australia: ‘outdated skills have become a deliberate, if indiscriminate, consequence, a product of policy...inherent in the logic of ‘saving’ labor and labor costs [*sic*]’ (Wolin, 2016: 520).

Since the Hawke-Keating era, changes to industrial relations law have benefitted managers and skilled workers, in the process removing interventions that once protected the interests of the less skilled (Quiggin, 1999: 11). Under Keating, the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) was established to promote ‘decentralised ‘enterprise bargaining’ over centralized wage fixing’ (Stanford, 2016: 212). These trends continued with the introduction of enterprise bargaining in 1993 by the Howard Coalition Government, denying the capacity for cross-company industrial organising. The 1996 Workplace Relations Act introduced individual employment contracts between employers and employees, by-passing collective agreements – the only real social power of organised workers. The establishment of the Australian Fair Pay Commission in 2006, which replaced the AIRC, completed the Howard-era institutionalisation of neoliberalism (Stanford, 2016: 212). These changes to industrial relations were ‘aimed squarely at isolating employees, [and] removing their support networks’ (Lawrence, 2006: 111). The new system of workplace relations ‘deregulated individual and collective negotiations...with no role for trade unions unless permitted by individual employers’ (Western *et al.*, 2007: 403, 413). This marked a major shift in relative bargaining power from labour to capital (Cahill, 2007: 224). The question of greater ‘productivity’ was enshrined in the Productivity Commission, established in 1998, with its economic modelling firmly grounded in neoclassical economic theory

(Stanford, 2016: 212). The Commission's reports have legitimised the Abbott-Turnbull Coalition Government's attempt to reduce penalty rates for hospitality and retail employees, a 'cost cutting' initiative (Australian Associated Press, 2017) significantly increasing financial pressure on these workers.

The destruction and demonisation of the Australian trade union movement through government legislation and a concerted effort to delegitimise trade unionism as an expression of social power has intensified the problem of labour insecurity (Cahill, 2007: 223). In Australia, as elsewhere in the West, trade unions and what remains of the Keynesian welfare-state can be said to be 'regarded as blocking opportunity structures and closing off mobility channels' by those whose social and material position is threatened by change (Immerfall, 1998: 252). The crippling of these institutions, which previously sustained jobs and provided an anchor for class identity, have left many workers unable to effectively address grievances, leaving them to seek 'new sources of identification' (Goodliffe, 2013: 94). The ONP's promise of a familiar and secure Australia becomes appealing compared to the empty mantra of 'jobs and growth' for those anxious of displacement.

Employment security and especially unemployment rates are key elements of the ONP's discourse. Concerns of joblessness for 'hard working' Australians has always been the pretext their nativist political appeal (Jackman and Volpert, 1996: 507-508). In Australia, unemployment has been over 5% since the GFC, with a 14-month high in February 2017 of 5.9% (ABS, 2017a). Further, a segment of the hidden unemployed 'is indicated by the falling participation in the labour force of men with no post-school education', with the data indicating that the chances of non-employment for such individuals 'has been steadily rising' (Richardson and Dennis, 2014: 1). As the ABS defines the unemployed as those who did not work more than one hour but who are looking for and able to work, the official unemployment figures would significantly understate unemployment rates.

Looking at the total underutilisation of labour (combining both officially-recorded unemployment and underemployment), the rate has steadily risen to 14.4%. The underemployment rate reached a record high of 8.7% in January 2017 (ABS, 2017a). Meanwhile, the proportion of casual employees has grown steadily over a 20-year trend (ABS, 2010). Among casual workers there are significantly more part-time casuals than full-

time, with around 2.3 part-time casuals for every full-time (Kryger, 2015: 1). Compared to full-time workers, casuals experience significantly more precarious employment conditions, with nearly half of casual employees (45.1%) employed in their current job for less than a year, and only 6.5% in their current job for 10 or more years (Kryger, 2015: 4-5). Almost 54.7% experience significant differences in income between one pay period and the next (Kryger, 2015: 4-5). These figures can be said to indicate a 'reserve army' of 'involuntary', precarious employees existing alongside the official unemployment figures (Cahill, 2007: 224). The ONP has evidently succeeded in tapping into this reserve of social and material anxiety, using fear over unemployment to perpetuate a sense of crisis for which the Other is responsible.

It must be emphasised that those directly affected by un- or under-employment do not necessarily constitute the entirety, or even the majority, of the ONP's support base (Jackman and Volpert, 1996: 517). Those who may perceive themselves as threatened, particularly the lower middle class, are equally likely recruits. Indeed, the strongest support for populist radical right parties internationally remains among the petit-bourgeoisie (Inglehart and Norris, 2016: 27). As (Immerfall, 1998: 250) argues, it is the 'fear of unemployment and social dislocation rather than actual experience...[a] perception of being on the wrong side of social change' that motivates support for the populist radical right. To the anxious petit-bourgeoisie, unemployment figures are indicative of poor economic performance overall and cause for great concern, even if their own income and employment status remains relatively secure.

Australian workers are also being expected to work into older age, even as welfare support for the elderly becomes increasingly difficult to attain: the aged pension eligibility age is set to increase to 70 by 2035 (Australian Department of Human Services, 2016). These changes to the pension are part of the broader effort by consecutive governments to rein in social spending. The Coalition Government's handling of the Centrelink's automated debt recovery system demonstrates its mindset: welfare recipients are effectively criminalised (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2017; Kanus, 2017; Seccombe, 2017). Those seeking to access income support must participate in 'work for the dole' programs and apply for 40 jobs per month to satisfy 'Mutual Obligation' requirement before receiving payments that even the Business Council of Australia considers inadequate (Business Council of Australia, 2012). In this context, the ONP's promise to ensure the longevity of social welfare like

the pension for those deemed 'eligible' are appealing to many (PHON, 2015a). Notably however, the ONP's 'eligible' candidates for welfare are limited to those who it defines as Australian citizens, which links it closely to the Party's nativist ideological prerogatives.

Demographically, those economic groups most likely to support the ONP – the self-employed, blue-collar workers, small business owners and small farmers – are unlikely to organise themselves along socioeconomic or class lines (Goodliffe, 2013: 94). That blue-collar workers and small business owners may generally be said to have different outlooks on the economy and the role of the state in it demonstrate the importance of the ONP's populist discourse in unifying (at least temporarily) these often-oppositional social forces. The Party's discursive construction of the Other – Muslims and migrants more broadly – provide a racialised scapegoat as the cause of social and material distress. This scapegoating reduces or denies the complexities of neoliberal market reform, the exploitative processes of the global economy and class struggle to a simplistic demonisation of the Other.

The inability of the 'political class' to address the material and social anxieties generated by the neoliberal project is key in translating the discontent and social suffering into the political appeal of the ONP. The absence of meaningful alternatives heightens the problem. The Australian Greens commitment to 'progressive' politics remains largely limited to the urban, tertiary-educated 'moral' middle class (Simms, 2013), rather than the rural and urban-fringe heartland of the ONP. Labor is caught between directing its campaigning towards the largest electoral group – the middle class – and retaining its traditionally working class base (Rolfe, 2014). Despite Labor's best efforts to isolate the ONP electorally, many ONP supporters appear to be former ALP voters, with the ALP winning two of its Queensland Senate seats in the 2016 federal election off the back of individual ONP/ALP preference splitting (Australian Electoral Commission, 2016b).

This detachment of classes from the political parties with which they were previously associated has left large portions of the working and middle class more prone to support the ONP, which they believe will better represent their interests. The ONP have filled the 'political and cultural vacuum' by 'presenting ideological alternatives to what it sees as the stale technocracy of conservative liberalism and social democracy' (Antón-Mellón, 2013: 53). The ONP voter's preferences flowed almost

equally to Labor and the Coalition in the lower house during the 2016 federal election (49.53 and 50.47 per cent respectively), indicating that the major parties 'bled' voters to ONP at comparable rates (Australian Electoral Commission, 2016b).

Beside the electoral pivot toward the urban middle class, the convergence of the Coalition and Labor towards the 'sensible centre' has opened political space on the right and left for political entrepreneurs to exploit (Deutchman, 2000: 55). If parliamentary parties are unable (or unwilling) to confront the 'new political exigencies' generated by neoliberalism, it creates 'opportunities for new parties ready to exploit popular political discontent' (Betz, 1994: 35). The 'post-ideological' nature of contemporary liberal democracy has weakened traditional voter loyalties, presenting further opportunities for new political formations to 'promote themselves as viable alternatives' (Betz, 1994: 67). Indeed, a growing portion of Australian voters have come to reject the two major parties at the polls, giving first ballot preferences to candidates other than the ALP or Coalition in the 2016 election (Denniss, 2016: 3, 11). According to the 2016 Australian Election Study, 40% of voters are dissatisfied with democracy in Australia, while only 26% believe the government can be trusted (Cameron and McAllister, 2016). These are the lowest recorded levels of support, since 1970 and 1969 respectively (Cameron and McAllister, 2016).

Conclusions

This article has sought to clarify the nature of the contemporary ONP, incorporating it within the populist radical right party family (as analysed by Mudde, 2007, 2017). The Party's synthesis of nativism, authoritarianism and populism makes it unique in modern Australian politics. We argue that these typological features are directly interrelated with the nature of economic change in Australia. The ONP's nativism is a response to the socio-historical legacy of the linking of concepts like multiculturalism and immigration with globalisation and the challenges this brings to the Australian labour market. Its authoritarianism is tied to the declining capacity for the state to influence policy as the economy becomes integrated into the global market. Finally, the ONP's populism is distinguished by its economic themes, and is primarily directed against

a ‘political class’ and immigrant Other considered directly responsible for Australia’s deteriorating economic position.

A second key proposition developed in this article is that the re-emergence of ONP is tied to the pace and nature of changes in Australian political economy, derived from the pursuit of neoliberal ambitions. The declining capacity to deliver on the expectations of ‘average’ Australians – lower taxes, higher wages and better services – has left many increasingly fearful of material and social displacement and disillusioned with ‘politics as usual’. Inspired by a mythic interpretation of Australian society, the ONP represents reaction to much of the economic and social change associated with neoliberal transformation. Widening inequality, stagnating wages, a broad transformation of Australia’s industry and the resulting labour market precariousness all contribute to a generalised state of economic anxiety which the ONP feeds off. By positing a return to a familiar past, and designating scapegoats on whom the decline can be blamed, the Party offers a sense of purpose to those embattled by structural change, namely the working and lower-middle classes. As ONP Senator Brian Burston’s maiden speech recalled, ‘how things have changed since the 1950s and 1960s – back then we were poor but we knew implicitly that Australia belonged to us’ (Keany, 2016).

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