

Tony Abbott's Liberal Party adopts Pauline Hanson's 'equality' rhetoric

By Patrick Keane

17 June 2015



A negative, simplistic, monocultural definition of "equality", popularised by Pauline Hanson, is a key element of Prime Minister Tony Abbott's electoral strategy, writes [Patrick Keane](#).

IN 2010, I began an honours year in political science at the University of Queensland. The primary task of the year long course was a research project and mine was to explain the success of [Pauline Hanson's One Nation](#) at the [1998 Queensland State Election](#).

The rhetorical strategy deployed by Hanson, which became known as dog whistling, demanded an end to funding for Indigenous welfare and community groups under the guise of a demand for equality. As all citizens are equal, argued One Nation, so none should get "special treatment".

This became the rhetorical device used by the

Right to insist upon a monocultural Australia, that ignored the disadvantage experienced by indigenous Australians in education, employment and life expectancy. This strategy and the negative definition of equality it depends upon is used today by the current Liberal National Government.

I am conscious my project was not simply academic for me.

In 1998, I was completing the final year of my undergraduate degree at the University of Queensland. And I recall hearing one of the reasons people gave for supporting [Hanson](#) was that she was brave enough to say out loud what most people thought in private.

I thought:

"But I don't think that!"

And neither did most of the people who lived in my world. But, as I know now, my world was rather small.

The first time I voted was 1996, the same Federal election that saw Hanson elected. But it was not until 1998 that I had what I consider my first genuine political experience.

1998 was the year of the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, but it was also the year of the MUA/Patrick's [Waterfront Dispute](#). I was a member of young Labor and

loosely involved in student politics on campus. A solidarity group was formed to support the "Wharfies" and I spent a few days a week over the course of the dispute on the picket lines with them.

At the time, I did not connect the rise of Hanson and One Nation to the MUA/Patricks dispute, but in hindsight I realised both were the consequence of the policies and rhetoric of the new Liberal-National Government under Prime Minister John Howard, and its strategy to divide Australians in order to maintain an electoral majority. [Howard](#) wanted to divide unionists from the MUA and what would ordinarily be considered "working class" Australians from other working class Australians, and white Australians from non-white Australians.

Before the 1998 Queensland State Election, One Nation appeared to have a mutually beneficial relationship with the Liberal National Coalition, federally, under Prime Minister John Howard and, at the state level, with State Premier [Rob Borbidge](#). Borbidge [underestimated the threat](#) One Nation posed to the National Party in Queensland — a mistake that led to the end of his Government. Howard [failed to publically reject Hanson immediately](#) and although he claimed this was a mistake he nevertheless quickly moved to appropriate Hanson's policies.

Pauline Hanson's bitter harvest
<http://t.co/GQyqstpNOP> via [@smh](#)

— Dave Donovan (@davrosz) [June 17, 2015](#)

Howard tried to ~~abolish the Aborigine~~ [Support equality, not bigotry. Subscribe to IA for just \\$5. A language and official rejection of racism. He also adopted Whitey's message of "equality".](#) defence policy reflects terror rhetoric then it's

In Pauline Hanson's letter to the [Queensland Times](#) on 6 January 2015

1996, that got h
the Liberal Part



Black deaths in be [Robert Tick](#) that as much m political grands for white deaths Tickner's stater should not go to

apparently it is not working. imagine what type of country this would be to live in if Aborigines didn't go to jail for their crimes. One of these men was serving a 12-year sentence and it wasn't just for a speeding fine.

[#TonyAbbott](#)

[#auspol](#)

Can you imagine then if we had equality, then we would have no prisoners at all? The indigenous people of this country are as much

[pic.twitter.com/xiEvFLm42I](#)

responsible for their actions as any other colour or race in this country. The problem is that politicians in all their profound wisdom have and are causing a racist problem.

— Mark Bishop (@itsmarkbishop) [March 3, 2015](#)

I would be the first to admit that, not that many years ago the Aborigines were treated wrongly but in trying to correct this they have gone too far. I don't feel responsible for the treatment of Aboriginal people in the past because I had no say but my concern is now and for the future.

How can we expect this race to help themselves when governments shower them with money, facilities and opportunities that only these people can obtain no matter how minute the indigenous [sic] blood is that flows through their veins and that is what is causing racism.

Prime Minister John Howard echoed Hanson's letter to the *Queensland*

Times at Longreach in 1997, when [he](#) [said](#):

I think that what has happened in this country is that we had a pendulum of Aboriginal affairs and I think that it has swung too far over in this direction particularly because of the Wik decision and what I am trying to do is to bring it back into the middle and I think that that is where it ought to be ...

... I do not believe in intergenerational guilt when it comes to Aboriginal affairs. I am aware of the history of this country. I am aware of the fact that the Indigenous people were here first. I do not exhibit a sense of shame for what our forebears did...

... I understand the resentment that the rest of Australia feels when social security services are made available to minorities that are not available to them...

On the 10th of March this year, Prime Minister Tony Abbott used a new formulation of this inversion of equality and [told](#) ABC Radio in Kalgoorlie that the proposed defunding of remote indigenous communities in Australia was legitimate because:

"It's not the job of the taxpayer to subsidise lifestyle choices."

The next day the Prime Minister defended his comment, telling 2GB's Alan Jones:

"The general principle is you and I as Australians are free to do what we want to do ... if you or I chose to live in a very remote place to what extent

are taxpayers expected to fund our choices?"

On the same day, Treasurer Joe Hockey wholeheartedly supported PM Abbott's comments:

"... the Prime Minister is absolutely right, you can't raise the expectations that you're going to have equality of opportunity in every part of Australia – every corner of Australia."

Or in other words, the Prime Minister was saying that we were treating non-Indigenous Australians unfairly because we weren't subsidising their lifestyle choices.

This rhetoric of equality overlooks that many of our citizens have special needs not shared by others. Indigenous Australians have a history of discrimination, rejection and persecution by the dominant culture, that places them at an unfair disadvantage. Others share this disadvantage. The disabled, for example, have special needs which although we do not share we wouldn't swap places with them.

The narrow rhetoric of "equality" has been cynically used by Hanson and Abbott to appeal to an insensitive and uncaring majority culture, to the detriment of a disadvantaged and/or discriminated against "other".

You can read more about Patrick Keane's research project [here](#) and [here](#). You can follow Patrick on Twitter [@pckeane2014](#).

Why does Noel Pearson believe a voice in parl would be better than a treaty enshrining gdp that could provide genuine independence? [#qanda](#)

— Patrick Conan Keane (@pckeane2014) [June 15, 2015](#)