

Australia's Global 'Exit': Tribalism and International Institutions

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Global Research, September 15, 2016

Region: [Oceania](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Australian values and way of life are also at risk from insidious institutions such as the unelected swill that is the United Nations. Senator Roberts, One Nation Party, Sep 14, 2016.

It all begins with a promise. A promise, less for a better future than a reclaimed past. Reclamation of the familiar, in fact, being the fundamental idea. "As a servant to the people of Queensland and Australia, I'm here to discuss with the chamber and the Australian people how we will rebuild our great nation." These words from the inaugural speech of One Nation's Malcolm Roberts set the trend in the Australian Senate Chamber.

He venerated fellow the party's founder Senator Pauline Hanson as the source of his inspiration, as the great interrogator of Australian complacency since 1998, when she spoke of the "swamping" effects of Asian immigration and the benefits the indigenous population were supposedly receiving. Roberts was certainly on secure ground observing that many of Hanson's views were stealthily incorporated into Australia's policies, be they on security or refugees.

That venerated leader seemed visibly uncomfortable at such praise, but proceeded to tweak the swamping theme in her own senate inaugural address, using Muslims as the great substitute. "Now we are in danger of being swamped by Muslims, who bear a culture and ideology that is incompatible with our own."

Hanson and Roberts hail from a long line of populists suspicious of the "international institution," which they regard as something of a meddling, threatening Frankenstein. But it is Roberts who couches matters with greater meaning, adding zest to armchair paranoia. (It is doubtful, for instance, whether Hanson has any serious understanding about what global institutions actually do.)

In truth, there is very little to be suspicious about such institutions as the UN, so bogged down in its own self-serving wishes, a bureaucratic clot incapable of actually pursuing the aspirations it has set. Changing the world as an aim through non-binding commitments is far from actually doing so. A promise is rather difference from an aspiration.

That did not stop such critics of it as the late US Senator Jesse Helms, whose stranglehold of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee enabled him to issue bristling missives about the phantom power of that body. "The UN aspires," he insisted in the pages of *The National Interest*, "to impose its moral authority on the United States in the name of international justice. The American people will not buy it." [1]

Not all of Roberts' comments are extracted from a cryogenic loony bin. There is

understandable cynicism of the international banking sector, which he regards as “one of the greatest threats to our way of life”. His suggestion against this manipulative, self-enriching cabal? The creation of a people’s bank that would “shield the manipulation of our economy by the tight-knit international banking sector.” Even the Right of politics can do a socialism of sorts.

In expressing what, at times, has to count for legitimate criticism, Roberts ruins the dish. He overeggs the pudding, over spices the casserole. “The EU is a template for total socialist domination of Europe through unelected bodies, such as the IMF, forcing their frightening agenda on the people.” A few odd titbits are thrown in for good measure. “It is also the UN’s template, and Australia must leave the UN. We need an Aus-exit.”

This is terribly flattering for the United Nations, which tends to resemble a floundering animal in the face of the currents of history at the best of times. Bodies such as the IMF have tended to have, arguably, greater weight in inflicting economic pain on client states in the guise of neoliberal reform. The UN, by way of contrast, remains a fairly innocuous beast prone to the odd calamitous blunder.

The United Nations, in other words, be they the blue helmets, the moral force for international law, are only as good as the states that fund it, and the personnel provided to its offices. As an international institution, it has given every ground to assume that it will fail at various points, while doing background bookkeeping.

Be that as it may, Senator Roberts has given voice to an entire gamut of terrors and suspicions similarly found in the US and in Europe, largely because he sees them as immorally sinister impositions. All that comes from without is to be feared and repelled. In that, he occupies the ground of the conspiracy theorist and fearful citizen, an individual who decided that there are facts not worth having, and others worth making up.

Not all in this strain of thinking can be dismissed as ridiculous, or even fanciful. Institutions, when they become ungainly and too large for their good, gnaw away at liberties. But Australia’s pretence to be an international citizen has been in doubt for many years (witness its attitude to the UN Refugee Convention, which it insists on ignoring). The Senator’s call for an exit would simply affirm that.

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Notes

[1] <http://nationalinterest.org/article/american-sovereignty-and-the-un-283>

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