

Noel Pearson praises Pauline Hanson's defence of Julian Assange



Noel Pearson says Pauline Hanson's stance on Julian Assange "may well be right and the government wrong."

Scott Henry
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Noel Pearson has heaped praise on Pauline Hanson and suggested the One Nation leader could well become "a great champion" for indigenous Australians.

Mr Pearson, an adviser to the Cape York Partnership and co-chair of Good to Great Schools Australia, says Senator Hanson is a political figure who stands up for the "powerless, forgotten people, whether asylum seekers, indigenous people or those left behind by globalisation".

In an opinion article for News Corp newspapers, Mr Pearson applauds her "principled call" for a presidential pardon for Julian Assange which he says shines "an important light on the selective standards of many Australians and particularly the freedom-loving right of Australian politics".

Earlier this month Senator Hanson announced she would petition the Australian and American governments to work on the immediate release of "political prisoner" Mr Assange, who has been holed up in the Ecuadorean embassy in London for four years fearing extradition to Sweden then the US.

"I hope that in light of his great service towards freedom and truth, President-elect Donald Trump will consider granting Mr Assange a full presidential pardon," Senator Hanson said in a statement.

Mr Pearson said Senator Hanson is “right”.

“Assange is an Australian who has stood up for the public’s right to know, for freedom of information,” Mr Pearson says. “Australian mainstream political silence and inaction on Assange sits in stark contrast to Hanson’s plea for his pardon. The government may think it necessary to prioritise Australia’s alliance with the US but, on this issue, Hanson may well be right and the government wrong.”

Mr Pearson continues: “While those on the right who see themselves as principled defenders of freedom have usually declined to speak in defence of Assange, Hanson has identified the key issues at stake: the people’s right to know and Australia’s duties to its citizen. Hanson’s stand on Assange is principled and patriotic”.

He then asks if “contrary to the intuitions of many who have feared — as I have — that Hanson’s ascendancy may be harmful to Australia ... that her influence and ideas might also be good for Australia?”

“It is also the dynamic between the parties and individual players and the pressure they put on each other that can propel productive change,” Mr Pearson suggests. “It is through discourse, argument and negotiation between competitive policies and philosophies that the right outcomes can be located. Creative tension is how great ideas are born. For all her faults, Hanson is delivering a creative tension much needed in Australia, which could drive the discourse in productive directions.

“How apt that an anti-establishment activist of the left may find his greatest champion on the far right, in the anti-establishment politics of Hanson. Yet it has often been the case that those shunned in our community find their most passionate allies on the edges of the political spectrum.

“If the political centre guards the establishment, it is often those on the fringes who challenge the power structures and propel productive structural change. We are used to seeing support for the underdog on the left, but it also periodically rises on the right.”

Mr Pearson says it was often the case that indigenous Australians found “great champions on the far right”

“The practical right tend to understand the need for substantive change and are less likely to be sucked into symbolism and feel-good statements. Often, among the good-hearted right the strongest support for meaningful recognition and reform emerges,” he says.

“On Assange, Hanson has demonstrated an ability to be principled, and to stand up for what’s right. She has demonstrated fierce loyalty to an Australian countryman in need. Her national loyalty surpasses any left-right politicking. She could bring the same principled patriotism to her engagement with indigenous people seeking a fair place in this country.

“Our shared indigenous heritage is the inheritance of all Australians. Together, we must find a way to cherish the Ancient, the Old and the New. Hanson is to be commended for her patriotic stand on Assange. My hope is her patriotism will extend to indigenous Australians. There is common ground yet to be found.”