Don’t shout down parliament

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Protesters hold up banners in the public gallery of the House of Representatives yesterday. Picture: AAP

How times change. In the 1970s in Queensland, police with batons used to beat protesters in Brisbane street marches demonstrating for the right to demonstrate under Joh Bjelke-Petersen’s iron regime.

These days in Canberra, parliament seemingly sits at the whim of a noisy minority protesting a policy that was taken to the last election and endorsed by both major parties.

And the protesters are embraced by Greens leader Richard DiNatale.

The 1970s Brisbane demonstrations and the reaction against the Bjelke-Petersen street march ban overreach inspired a generation of progressive politicians including Peter Beattie, who went on to become that state’s premier.

For them, the right to protest was hard won. It presaged other movements that challenged established thinking and which have ultimately backed issues such as indigenous land rights and equal rights for homosexuals.

This week’s protests at federal parliament are something entirely different.

Far from demonstrating outside parliament, which is allowed, these protesters decided to take matters into their own hands and close down the whole show. Then they followed up by abseiling down the Coat of Arms.

In a parallel, but equally worrying move, Pauline Hanson has had to close down an event because police fear for the safety of those attending due to an activist backlash.

The Canberra stunts and the events in Melbourne are about shouting down the majority and imposing the will of the minority by demeaning and overwhelming the institution of parliament.

What is most concerning is that this week will have consequences for average voters and likely none for the protesters.

Given the embarrassment caused to parliament there has been an inevitable security crackdown.

After a decade of having access whittled away by the ever-present threat of terrorism, these ignorant millennial snowflakes risk doing Islamic State’s work for them.

Federal parliament — which was designed intentionally to allow voters to walk over the grassed roof of the legislature — will be slathered with restrictions, areas will be roped off and ordinary taxpayers will be the losers.

The public galleries, where voters can come to watch question time, will inevitably become increasingly inaccessible as security is stepped up.

Politicians (if this is possible) will become even further removed from the people. It must stop. Protest by all means against One Nation, asylum-seeker treatment or any subject of your choice. Vote for whoever you like.

But don’t shout down parliament. It is the people’s voice and it must be heard.