

Australia: Greens select former military intelligence officer as parliamentarian

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The Greens preselected Justin Field, a former military intelligence officer, to represent their party in the upper-house of the New South Wales (NSW) state parliament last Saturday. Field's victory followed a bitter factional conflict over the seat, which was vacated in May as a result of the death of sitting Greens member, John Kaye.

Fourteen candidates sought selection, which was decided on the basis of a ballot of NSW Greens members. Around 2,000 votes were registered, with Field reportedly winning 955 first preference votes.

Field was widely viewed as the candidate favoured by the party's national leadership, including Greens founder, Bob Brown, and current leader, Richard Di Natale. Their support for the former military intelligence officer was directed against a "left" grouping in NSW, led by federal Senator Lee Rhiannon. In the midst of the campaign, Brown called for a "clean-out" of the NSW Greens and Rhiannon's resignation.

The leadership's backing for a figure with high-level connections to the military and intelligence establishment is another sign of the party's right-wing trajectory. Indeed his background was considered an asset to his campaign and was featured in online biographies.

The Greens co-convenors in NSW, Debbie Gibson and Hall Greenland, who has for decades postured as a "left," immediately issued a statement "celebrat(ing) the beginning of Justin's parliamentary term..." One of the unsuccessful candidates, Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, summed up the general tenor of the response, stating in an online post that Field "was also an army intelligence officer before joining the Greens, so he will add an interesting component and range of talents to our MPs."

Field told the WSWs this week that he served in the army's intelligence corps between 2001 and 2007. From 2006 to 2007 he worked as an Operational Intelligence Analyst at the army's Joint Operations Intelligence Centre in Sydney, "working on questions concerning our deployment to the Middle-East, but primarily southern Iraq."

A job description for the role of Operational Intelligence Analyst on the army's website notes that employees work in a "highly classified environment," and have access to intelligence from "combat operations, covert surveillance, electronic warfare and satellite imagery" which they analyse and provide to "battlegroup commanders."

In other words, Field was playing a sensitive role in Australia's participation in the US-led neo-colonial occupation of Iraq. Field told the WSWs that he left the army in late 2007, having attained the rank of Captain. He said that he had grown "disillusioned" with the Iraq conflict. Field, however, did not publicly oppose the war. His retirement from the military also coincided with the withdrawal of the bulk of Australian troops from Iraq. Field noted that he had "done my time." He went to work as a "Security Risk Advisor" for the major telecommunications firm, Telstra, for the following two years.

Field joined the Greens around 2007–08, becoming a full-time policy advisor in early 2009. Field's relatively rapid rise to prominence has coincided with a campaign by the Greens to present themselves as a party of "parliamentary stability" capable of forming a government responsive to the agenda of the corporate elite, including on war and militarism.

At the time of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Greens postured as an anti-war party, winning support from layers of students and young people. They sought to

divert widespread opposition to the criminal invasion behind impotent appeals to the UN and the two-party parliamentary set-up within Australia.

The Greens' opposition to Australia's involvement in US-led wars in the Middle-East was always tactical. Bob Brown, Greens leader at the time of the invasion of Iraq and in the years following, called for Australian troops to be redeployed to "Australia's arc of stability" in the South Pacific, including to prevent a growth of Chinese influence.

Following the 2010 elections, the Greens formed a de-facto alliance with the Gillard Labor government. They played the central role in propping up the minority government, as it aligned Australia with the US "pivot to Asia" and its aggressive military build-up directed against China. At the same time, the government carried out an offensive against education, healthcare and welfare as part of a pro-business overhaul of public spending.

The Greens also backed the US-led regime-change operations in Syria and Libya, and in effect backed Australian involvement in the new US-led war in Iraq and Syria that was launched in 2014. Field enunciated the party's policy in a social media post at the time—a criticism of the lack of an overall strategy by the Coalition government, an appeal for parliamentary "debate" and "consensus" combined with denunciations of ISIS "barbarity" and the need for "governments to protect their people and sometimes that may include the use of military force."

Field, like party leaders such as Di Natale, has also hailed the example of the Gillard Labor government as a model to be emulated. He told the WSWs that the Greens were a "party of consensus" and that it was necessary to build "consensus in the parliament." When this reporter noted the right-wing agenda pursued by the Gillard government, Field stated, "just because you empower someone to be in government and seek to get outcomes—that doesn't mean that you buy into their agenda." However, by propping up the Labor government, they bear political responsibility for its policies, whatever limited criticisms that are made.

The Greens integration into the political establishment has exacerbated tensions within the party, which were on display during the upper-house contest. Bob Brown told the *Monthly* in August that "They need a clean-out in New South Wales. The

people who have been for decades running the NSW Greens need to do what I did: retire and make way for new blood and people more in tune with the electorate in 2016. This is no longer 1986."

Brown has elsewhere accused the Rhiannon grouping of introducing "factionalism" into the selection contest. Rhiannon responded by declaring, "Look at the agenda Bob is running here. He's used to getting his candidate up for pre-selection and when that doesn't work he gives us a hard time."

The public conflict followed bitter recriminations between the groupings over the failure of the Greens to increase their representation in the House of Representatives or boost their vote in the Senate in the July federal election.

The divisions are entirely tactical. The Rhiannon wing of the party is fearful they will be sidelined as Di Natale and others continue to make overtures to Labor or the Liberals for the formation of a coalition government, and cultivate figures such as Field. For their part, Di Natale and the party's national leadership view the Rhiannon grouping, and its relations with various middle-class protest movements, as an impediment to attracting support from the most affluent sections of the electorate, and the corporate elite itself.

The differences between them did not prevent both groupings from coming together behind the Gillard Labor government, as it implemented a program of war abroad and austerity against the working class.



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