

More MPs face disqualification after Australian Senate president quits

Mike Head

2 November 2017

Australian Senate president Stephen Parry will submit his resignation today to Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove, both as president and a member of parliament, after the UK Home Office confirmed that he is a British citizen, as well as an Australian citizen.

As Parry's departure demonstrates, what has become, in effect, a nationalist purge of parliament, is far from over. Today, the *Australian*, Rupert Murdoch's flagship, published a list of 21 other MPs whom it claims have not provided documentary proof that they renounced their entitlements to citizenship of other countries before standing for election.

Parry, a Liberal Party senator, became the sixth MP since July to be removed for breaching section 44(i) of the reactionary 1901 Constitution, which forbids anyone from even nominating for parliament if they hold "allegiance" to a "foreign power" or are "entitled" to citizenship rights of another country.

Like the five MPs disqualified by the High Court last Friday, Parry's "entitlement" to dual citizenship was tenuous. He fell foul of section 44(i), despite being born in Australia, simply because his father emigrated from Britain in 1951—66 years ago.

Those already removed on a similar basis are deputy prime minister and National Party leader Barnaby Joyce and deputy National Party leader Fiona Nash, as well as two Greens senators, Scott Ludlam and Larissa Waters, who resigned in July as soon as the citizenship furore began, in order to prove their commitment to Australian nationalism. Malcolm Roberts, a Senate representative of Pauline Hanson's anti-immigrant One Nation, was also ousted.

As with the other disqualified senators, Parry will be replaced by a nominee of his own party. His successor is likely to be Richard Colbeck, a former senator and tourism minister who lost his seat in the 2016 election. The implications of the ongoing disqualification saga are

far broader, however, directly affecting the basic democratic rights of millions of people.

Dual citizenship has been permitted in Australia since 2002. An estimated half of the country's increasingly diverse adult population now has, or is entitled to, that status. But in a sweeping anti-democratic ruling, the seven High Court judges last week unanimously applied a strict interpretation of section 44(i) that disqualifies them all from election to parliament unless they formally renounce their dual citizenship rights.

The supreme court's judgment was replete with nationalist and patriotic language, demanding "unqualified allegiance to Australia" and "single-minded loyalty," free from any "foreign loyalties or obligations." The judges insisted that anyone "entitled" to citizenship of another country was "ineligible" to stand for parliament, even if they had no knowledge of that entitlement and had never accepted it.

Following Parry's resignation, growing calls are being made throughout the media and political establishment for an "full audit" of the 226 senators and members of the House of Representatives, and all other candidates in the 2016 double dissolution election, to determine their eligibility.

This would be a full-scale McCarthyite-style witchhunt. It would require a genealogical investigation of every candidate, tracing their ancestry back, at least to their grandparents, to see whether the law of any other country potentially bestowed citizenship entitlements on them.

So far, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and other leaders of the ruling Liberal-National Coalition are rejecting demands for such an investigation, together with the Labor Party leadership. Both parties fear losing more MPs. But several backbench government and Labor members have now joined the chorus, which was first instigated by the Greens in July. Others agitating for an "audit" include the xenophobic One Nation, Senator Cory

Bernardi's Australian Conservatives and another right-wing populist, Nick Xenophon.

Today's *Australian* editorial reiterated that demand, which it originally took up in August, reminding its readers that it had declared "this time the Greens are right." The editorial expressed alarm that "since then time has been wasted and the turmoil has increased."

On national television last night, Greens leader Senator Richard Di Natale urged the government and Labor to "show some leadership" by backing the Greens' audit call, in the interests of the "national wellbeing" and to halt the slide into "constitutional crisis territory." Once again, the Greens are proving themselves to be the most loyal servants of the existing political order.

Despite the Coalition government losing two key cabinet ministers, and facing the prospect of losing its one-seat majority in the House of Representatives if Joyce fails to regain his seat at a December 2 by-election, there is nothing progressive whatsoever in this purge.

None of the MPs are being removed because of their right-wing and anti-working class policies. They are being ousted, on the orders of the High Court, the judicial pinnacle of the state apparatus, for being potentially disloyal to Australian capitalism. The judges explicitly referred to the need to ensure undivided allegiance, and freedom from any overseas military service obligations, in times of war.

The nationalist cleansing of parliament has a definite political agenda. It is being conducted under conditions of preparations for the Australian government to join even more catastrophic US-led wars, not just against North Korea but China and Russia, the two powers regarded most by Washington as obstacles to global US hegemony.

For more than a year, the media, working hand-in-glove with the US-linked Australian intelligence agencies, has repeatedly mounted frenzied propaganda campaigns against supposed Chinese "interference" in Australian politics, society, universities and business.

A column in today's *Australian* by editor-at-large Paul Kelly pointed to the underlying connection between the disqualification saga and this promotion of an anti-Chinese and pre-war atmosphere. Kelly denounced any suggestion of amending the Constitution, via a referendum, to remove or modify the requirements of section 44(i), declaring: "The most ludicrous idea in the citizenship trauma is the proposal for a referendum to make our parliament truly multicultural by allowing MPs to be dual citizens."

The veteran Murdoch editor drew a direct link to a

potential conflict with China, asking: "How do you feel about having as prime minister an Australian-American dual citizen or an Australian-Israeli dual citizen or, if Beijing changes its policy, an Australian-Chinese dual citizen?" The references to the US and Israel were to provide a thin veneer for invoking the prospect of a confrontation with Beijing.

Kelly declared the necessity for a "powerful sense of sovereignty"—that is, xenophobic nationalism—and condemned any concession to the ever-more diverse character of the Australian population or popular internationalist sentiment. "Any serious push to reverse the import of section 44 would be a social engineering project aimed at weakening Australian sovereignty in the cause of internationalism."

Others in the media and corporate elite are expressing alarm at the damage being done to the parliamentary edifice by the political turmoil surrounding the disqualification imbroglio. In today's Fairfax Media outlets, national affairs editor Mark Kenny wrote: "The dual citizenship question burning like a subterranean coal fire beneath capital hill, is threatening collapse. A full blown 'legitimation crisis' looms. Confidence between the *represented* and the *representative*, is threadbare."

This only poses the question of why such a destabilising witch-hunt has been unleashed. It can be understood only as a means of disciplining and re-shaping the political establishment, and acclimatising public opinion, for conditions of war and even deeper accompanying austerity measures and attacks on basic democratic rights.

It is increasingly possible that the political crisis could see the Turnbull government fall, wracked by recriminations and rifts over the disqualifications. However, outside the independent intervention of the working class, fighting for an alternative socialist and internationalist perspective, this would only pave the way for the return of yet another right-wing, pro-US Labor government, most likely propped up by the Greens and the various populist formations in the parliament.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact