

The global processes behind the parliamentary crisis in Australia

James Cogan

17 November 2017

Official politics in Australia is in turmoil. On October 27, the High Court decreed that five elected members of parliament, including the deputy prime minister, were ineligible to sit in parliament because they had dual citizenship in another country.

The court upheld the most literal interpretation of a clause in the country's 1901 Constitution that proscribes anyone from standing for parliament who "is under any acknowledgment of allegiance, obedience, or adherence to a foreign power," or is "entitled to the rights or privileges of a subject or a citizen of a foreign power."

The unanimous ruling of the seven judges asserted that members of parliament could not have "foreign loyalties or obligations." The court endorsed the position that politicians must have "single-minded loyalty" to Australia.

Since the High Court decision, three more parliamentarians have resigned because their parents were born in Britain and they were therefore eligible for citizenship in the "foreign power" that colonised the continent and whose monarch is also the Queen of Australia.

In an agreement struck between the Liberal-National Coalition government and the opposition Labor Party, every member of parliament must now provide a disclosure statement by December 1. All members must swear that they have renounced any entitlement to citizenship elsewhere, stemming not only from where they or their parents were born, but also through their grandparents and even through marriage.

As many as 30 of the 226 members of the two houses of parliament may be forced out as a result. Even before the likely exodus leading up to December 1, the Coalition parties have already lost the threadbare one-seat majority in the lower house they need to govern.

The Greens, along with others in the political establishment, have suggested calling for the governor-general—the unelected head of state—to use the dictatorial powers vested in his office to dissolve parliament and order a new election.

The situation has left most Australians, let alone international observers, utterly bewildered. The country is one of the most culturally diverse on the planet. Its population has grown from barely seven million in 1945 to near 25 million today as the direct result of large-scale migration. Under Australian law, three million people have the right to dual citizenship in Britain alone. Millions more can claim dual citizenship in New Zealand, Italy, Greece and dozens of other countries from where people have migrated in the decades since World War II.

The working class suburbs of major cities such as Sydney and Melbourne are a true "melting pot." Workplaces, and especially the playgrounds of the country's schools, are testimony to the fact that people of different ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds can live and interact in fraternity and harmony, providing they are not disoriented and divided by racism and nationalism.

Yet, in 2017, that is precisely what the High Court has intervened to do. Members of parliament are the initial target of a sinister witch-hunt. The real target, however, is the ethnically and culturally diverse working class. The court, the supreme judicial arm of the capitalist state, has effectively decreed that half the population is "un-Australian" until they prove they have "undivided loyalty" by renouncing their purported "allegiance" to the country in which they, their parents or their grandparents were born.

The significance of what is unfolding can be understood only when it is assessed in the context of

world economic and political processes.

The vast globalisation of production that has taken place over the past 40 years has not led to a lessening of national antagonisms and conflicts. It has resulted in the complete opposite. The point has been reached where US imperialism—headed by the degenerate figure of Donald Trump—is openly threatening China, Germany, Japan and other economic rivals with trade war. As in the 1930s, the rupture of international economic relations is the prelude to military conflict.

The patriotic hysteria in Australia is just one expression of universal, global tendencies. In every country, the capitalist elite is stoking xenophobia against “foreigners” as they prepare, behind the backs of the masses, for war. Nationalism is the ideological means by which the ruling class tries to poison the minds of the working class majority into believing that it shares common interests with a tiny minority of ultra-rich corporate oligarchs.

Paul Kelly, the editor-at-large of Rupert Murdoch’s *Australian*, stressed the paramount importance of demanding unquestioned allegiance to the nation in a comment last week. He denounced any suggestion that the constitution be changed to allow dual citizens to stand for parliament as “a social engineering project aimed at weakening Australian sovereignty in the cause of internationalism.”

As the global struggle between the great powers develops, Australian foreign policy is based on the conclusion that war between its US ally and China over dominance of the Asia-Pacific region is inevitable. The dominant factions of the ruling class, and both the Coalition and Labor, support the complete and unconditional military alignment of Australia with Washington.

A report published this week by the state-funded Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) demonises China as a threat to US and Australian strategic interests. It blandly observes that war with China would “bring into consideration the use of nuclear weapons.”

The *Australian* welcomed the ASPI report in its November 16 editorial, lauding its authors for having “no time for the diplomatic sensitivities that seek to suggest our multi-billion-dollar submarine, frigate and missile acquisition programs have a potential enemy other than China in mind.”

The witch-hunt over dual citizens in the parliament

emerged amid constant agitation in the establishment media for action to be taken against purported “Chinese influence” in Australian politics and society. This is a part of a calculated attempt to create a war-time political atmosphere, with all “loyal” citizens expected to wrap themselves in the Australian flag and demonstrate their fidelity to the nation.

At the same time, the stoking of patriotism is motivated by the fear of the ruling elite. It is a desperate attempt to cultivate a right-wing constituency that will defend the “nation”—that is, the class interests of the capitalist oligarchs—from the inevitable eruption of struggle by the working class against the danger of war and social inequality. The top 10 percent of the population own at least 55 percent of the country’s wealth, with the top 1 percent controlling the lion’s share. Not far from the ostentatious displays of wealth in Sydney’s harbour suburbs, working class families earn so little they can barely keep a roof over their heads and feed themselves.

The consequences of the parliamentary crisis will be the refashioning of official politics. The longstanding two-party system dominated by the Coalition and Labor is disintegrating under the impact of immense geopolitical stresses and class antagonisms. As is the case across Europe and in the United States, the façade of democracy through which the capitalist class could rule in the past is breaking down. More and more openly, preparations are being made to dispense with it altogether and impose outright dictatorial measures.

The machinations of the ruling elite must be answered by the intervention of an independent political movement of the working class, advancing the socialist and internationalist alternative to capitalism and national divisions. In Australia and internationally, it is only the International Committee of the Fourth International and the Socialist Equality Party that fights for this perspective.



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