

Australian Greens use dual citizenship witch-hunt to cement right-wing credentials

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Over the past four months, the Australian Greens have emerged as the chief proponents of a nationalist purge targeting parliamentarians accused of possessing dual citizenship.

The campaign, invoking reactionary constitutional provisions that ban anyone with “foreign allegiance” from standing for election to parliament, has been aimed at stoking xenophobia and jingoism, amid Australia’s key role in US preparations for war in the Indo-Pacific. The disqualification of MPs also has served to legitimise increasing moves toward authoritarian and extra-parliamentary forms of rule to stave off the crisis of the entire political establishment.

Greens Senator Scott Ludlam was the first federal MP identified as an alleged dual citizen in July. He was “exposed” by John Cameron, a Perth barrister who apparently received confidential information from New Zealand officials showing that Ludlam was a citizen of that country, as well as Australia, because he was born in New Zealand.

Instead of opposing these anti-democratic moves, Ludlam immediately issued a fawning apology and resigned from parliament. He was followed by another Greens Senator, Larissa Waters, who revealed that she was a dual Canadian citizen, despite having left that country before she was one year old.

In media comments last week, Cameron hailed Ludlam’s decision, declaring that “credit” for the furore that has ensued should go to the former Greens senator. “If Mr. Ludlam had not resigned it would have remained buried, as it had been buried, for another two decades,” Cameron stated.

In other words, if Ludlam had denounced the reactionary constitutional provisions, which prevent up to half the population from standing for election, the corporate press and political establishment could not

have so easily pressed ahead with their xenophobic campaign.

Now, over 30 MPs have been identified as having potential “foreign allegiance,” in what only can be described as a McCarthyite-style witch-hunt.

Last month, the High Court, an arm of the state, disqualified five members of parliament, including Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, Ludlam and Waters. The ruling, backed by the Greens, effectively overturned the ballots of all those who had voted for the ousted parliamentarians.

Since then, the Greens have called for even more anti-democratic measures.

Earlier this month, Greens leader Senator Richard Di Natale publicly floated the possibility of asking the governor-general, the unelected representative of the Queen, Australia’s head of state, to intervene in the crisis, by dissolving both houses of parliament and thereby effectively suspending parliamentary democracy.

It would be the most direct political intervention by a governor-general since 1975. In that year, Governor-General John Kerr used the “reserve powers” vested in his office by the Constitution to dismiss sitting Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, in a political coup orchestrated by the CIA, the Australian intelligence and military authorities, and right-wing political forces.

At the same time, Di Natale and the Greens have continued to demand a full audit of all parliamentarians. This would entail a genealogical review of every MP, stretching back to their grandparents, aimed at identifying those whose heritage renders them ineligible, because they may have “divided loyalties.”

The actions of the Greens have revealed the right-wing character of the party, which speaks for affluent

sections of the upper middle-class. In promoting the most stringent interpretation of the Constitution, the Greens have signalled to the corporate elite that they are a party committed to the “national interest,” i.e., the interests of the ruling capitalist class.

The message has been received. A series of editorials in the Murdoch-owned *Australian* newspaper has hailed Di Natale and his colleagues for insisting on a patriotic “audit.”

On Sunday, the *Australian's* associate editor, Caroline Overington, wrote an article headlined: “Greens leading the way on key issues dominating politics.” Overington declared that on dual citizenship, the Greens had “behaved both impeccably, and honourably.” Noting that some of her readers thought the Greens were “cuckoo,” Overington asserted the Greens were now “adults.”

The lurch to the right by the Greens, and their favourable reception in the Murdoch media, is part of a crisis of all the major parliamentary parties. The federal Liberal-National Coalition government is on the brink of collapse, while recent state elections and by-elections have underscored the intense alienation of masses of ordinary people from all the big business parties.

Last Sunday, the Greens won a by-election for the Victorian state seat of Northcote. The party received a swing of almost 14 percent in the electorate, which had been held by the Labor Party since 1927. The Greens capitalised on opposition to the Victorian Labor government, which has slashed public spending and adopted a right-wing law and order agenda. The Greens also made an appeal to affluent layers in the increasingly gentrified inner Melbourne electorate.

At the Greens national conference on the weekend, Di Natale reportedly hailed the Northcote campaign, and spelt out a perspective of the Greens becoming a “party of government.” This would mean enforcing the dictates of the financial elite for sweeping austerity measures targeting social spending, and a stepped-up offensive against the conditions of the working class.

Di Natale said the party would target 25 federal House of Representatives seats over the next 25 years. Among them are some of the wealthiest electorates in the country, including Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull’s seat of Wentworth in Sydney’s eastern suburbs.

The Greens’ leader indicated that his party will seek to exploit opposition to growing social inequality, declaring there was a “global reaction against... tax breaks to the rich and powerful” and other pro-business policies. He insisted, however, that a Greens government would be committed to “economic growth”—code words for satisfying the profit demands of the financial aristocracy.

Di Natale said the Greens would enter governments, including with the Coalition, on a “case by case basis.” He stated: “In the not too distant future, multi-party government will be the rule rather than the exception.” The Greens represented “progressive mainstream values.”

These comments are a signal that the Greens are prepared to enter into any government, no matter how right-wing, and to back any and all policies demanded by the ruling elite. This would take to a new level the Greens’ role in propping up the minority Gillard Labor government from 2010 to 2013, as it deepened the persecution of refugees, aligned Australia with Washington’s plans for war against China, and imposed significant cuts to welfare, education and healthcare.

The rightward lurch of the Greens is part of a global process. In New Zealand, the Greens have entered a pro-war, pro-business coalition government with Labour and New Zealand First, a far-right xenophobic party. In Germany, the Greens participated in talks to form a multi-party government with Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian Democratic Union.

Amid a deepening crisis of capitalism around the world, and the breakdown of traditional political mechanisms, the Greens are stepping forward as right-wing, nationalist defenders of the capitalist class.



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