

Australian Labor Party parliamentarian resigns over dual citizenship furore

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Federal Labor Party parliamentarian David Feeney announced his resignation last Thursday, ahead of a pending High Court hearing that was to determine his alleged breach of Australia's anti-democratic constitution. Feeney is the first Labor parliamentarian to resign over the ongoing dual citizenship furore. A by-election is set to be held in early- or mid-March in his inner-north Melbourne electorate of Batman.

Section 44 (i) of the constitution proscribes anyone from standing for parliament who has "allegiance, obedience, or adherence to a foreign power" or is "entitled" to the "rights and privileges of a foreign power." The clause has triggered a parliamentary crisis. Seven elected representatives were forced to quit last year and six more could face a High Court determination of their eligibility to sit in parliament. Many more remain under media investigation because the birthplaces of their parents and grandparents could automatically "entitle" them to dual citizenship.

Feeney's case underscores the reactionary character of the witch hunt. The *World Socialist Web Site* has no brief for Feeney—he is a self-declared "machine man" of the Labor Party right wing. He was among several Labor and trade union US embassy informants revealed by diplomatic cables released by the WikiLeaks. But his forced resignation represents another attack on democratic rights. After being elected by the voters of Batman just 18 months ago, he has been forced out because his father was born in Northern Ireland.

On December 5, Feeney completed a statement for the newly-created parliamentary "Citizenship Register," which requires all MPs to produce documents, going back to the birth of their grandparents, to prove their sole Australian citizenship. He provided documentation showing that the Labor Party's legal unit advised him, before his entry to

parliament in 2007, that as a result of his father having been born in Belfast in 1942, he was automatically entitled to British citizenship and potentially Irish also. (People born in Northern Ireland are entitled to citizenship of the Republic of Ireland.) Feeney issued a signed statement explaining that he then "signed documents prepared for me in accordance with that advice as to the steps that I needed to take to renounce any inherited British and Irish citizenships."

Announcing his resignation on Thursday, Feeney said the evidence concerning his renunciation of Irish citizenship was intact, but he had been unable to locate documents proving his British renunciation. "The fact is that, after 10 years, most records have not been retained," he stated. "I have taken legal advice indicating that the material that has been located to date is insufficient to satisfy the High Court that I did, indeed, renounce my rights 10 years ago."

No one within the political or media establishment has raised any issue of democratic and legal principle in the Feeney affair. An estimated half of Australia's increasingly diverse population would be barred from standing for parliament by section 44(i).

The Labor Party threw him to the wolves because it hopes that its quickly handpicked candidate Ged Kearney will prove a stronger campaigner against the Greens, who are vying to win the Batman seat for the first time. Labor leader Bill Shorten welcomed Feeney's resignation, saying: "This decision is the right one and spares the valuable time and resources of the High Court."

Greens' leader Richard Di Natale demanded to know why Feeney had not stepped down earlier. The Greens have been the most vociferous advocates of the nationalist witch hunt, spearheading last year's calls for an "audit" of all 226 members of parliament. Last

November, Di Natale wrote a letter to the governor-general, the appointed representative of the British Queen, asking “to know what all the options are available to us in terms of bringing this issue to an urgent resolution.”

The Greens’ leader publicly raised the prospect of a constitutional coup like that of 1975, which saw the anti-democratic ousting of Gough Whitlam’s Labor government. “We know the governor-general, when it comes to a constitutional crisis, has played a role in the past,” Di Natale declared.

What is unfolding bears out the Socialist Equality Party’s analysis of the dual citizenship furore: “Under conditions of immense war tensions internationally, tremendous economic uncertainty and rising class antagonisms, it is being used to amplify a decades-long effort to divert and disorientate the population through nationalism and xenophobia. The demand for unquestioned ‘allegiance’ on the part of the parliamentary servants of the capitalist state is intended as a benchmark for implementation throughout society. Anyone who opposes the policies of the government will be labelled ‘un-Australian,’ a servant of foreign interests, or, under conditions of war, downright treasonous” (see: “The dual citizenship furore in the Australian parliament: What is at stake for the working class?”).

The Greens hope that the Batman by-election will deliver their second seat in the House of Representatives. Previously regarded as a “safe” Labor seat, parts of Batman have undergone significant gentrification in recent years, with professional upper-middle class layers moving in. The Greens won the state electorate of Northcote, which comprises the southern part of the federal Batman electorate, from Labor in a by-election last November.

Batman’s northern suburbs are more working class, but the Labor Party is widely despised for its right-wing, pro-business record in Victoria and nationally. Labor’s primary vote in Batman plunged from 57 percent in 2007 to 35 percent in 2016.

Labor candidate Ged Kearney has been president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) since 2010. She is responsible for numerous sell outs of workers’ industrial campaigns, continuing decades of the suppression of the working class by the ACTU and its affiliates.

Kearney is being promoted by sections of the media as a “star candidate” and a “left.” According to journalist Michelle Grattan she plans to “strongly prosecute progressive and cost-of-living issues.” Yet the unions, working closely with the Labor Party, have been responsible for driving down industrial action and wages growth to record low levels.

The Greens, who propped up the last Labor government, will run a no less bogus campaign, expected to focus on climate change and the proposed Adani mega-coal mine in Queensland. It can be safely predicted that neither Labor nor the Greens will, during the by-election campaign, even mention the growing danger of global war as a result of the aggressive operations of US imperialism and its allies, including Australia.



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