

A revealing line up at right-wing Australian Labor senator's funeral

Mike Head
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As the old saying goes: “You shall be known by the company you keep.” That certainly applies to Monday’s funeral for Labor Party Right faction senator Kimberley Kitching, who died this month of a suspected heart attack, aged 52.

Those who descended on Melbourne’s St Patrick’s Cathedral from across the country represented a roll call from the entire political and media establishment.

In a display of multi-party unity, opposition Labor and trade union leaders sat shoulder to shoulder with the Liberal-National Coalition government’s senior ministers, spearheaded by Defence Minister Peter Dutton, the government’s most outspoken war hawk. They were joined by leaders of the National Party, the Greens and the far-right One Nation.

This remarkable turnout was preceded by days of wall-to-wall media coverage virtually canonising Kitching. The first-term junior senator, who had never faced an election, was hailed as a “patriot,” a “lioness” and a “true warrior.”

How can this lauding of Kitching be explained? It is, above all, due to the incendiary part she played in demanding the escalation of the US-led confrontation with China, as well as Russia, and the realignment of Australian policy accordingly.

Especially significant was the attendance of militarist, anti-China figures, including far-right columnist Andrew Bolt, ex-Prime Minister Tony Abbott and his former chief of staff, now Sky News presenter, Peta Credlin, and former Defence Minister Kevin Andrews.

Alongside them were Kitching’s cross-party friends in an anti-China parliamentary group that calls itself “the Wolverines”: Liberals Andrew Hastie, Tim Wilson and James Paterson, plus Nationals Senator Matt Canavan.

This grouping, which closely echoes the positions of

the US-backed Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), calls for “political warfare” against Beijing, starting the imposition of investment bans and external investigations into alleged “genocide” and “torture” in China.

Kitching was a founding co-chair of IPAC in 2020, alongside Paterson and similar right-wing figures in other countries, notably US senators Marco Rubio (Republican) and Bob Menendez (Democrat)—both anti-China hawks.

Also conspicuous at the funeral were diplomatic representatives from the US, UK and Israel, as well as France, Japan, Taiwan and others. Kitching had strong links with Israel as well as the US. She was both the co-chair of the US-Australia Parliamentary Friendship Group and the deputy chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Israel (PFI).

The Tibetan separatist Dalai Lama sent a condolence message, as did Bill Browder, founder of the Magnitsky movement for unilateral economic and diplomatic sanctions targeting individuals. Kitching was instrumental in securing the passage of Australia’s own Magnitsky Act last year, modelled on the US legislation, now being utilised against Russia.

Former Labor leader Bill Shorten, who maintains close US links, delivered one of the eulogies. It was Shorten, when party leader, who installed Kitching, unelected, to fill a six-year vacancy in the Senate in 2016.

Media-fuelled allegations that some of Kitching’s Labor Senate colleagues “bullied” her by ostracising her are primarily bound up with factional wars inside Labor over China policy. These have been brought to a head by the escalating drive by Washington and its allies against China, which is regarded, with Russia, as an obstacle to US hegemony over the Eurasian

landmass and globally.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Coalition government, totally backed by Labor, has been in the forefront of this offensive, including by signing last year's AUKUS treaty with the US and UK governments, a military alliance against China that includes the supply of long-range nuclear-powered submarines to Australia. Most recently, Morrison labelled China and Russia as an "arc of autocracy" threatening the global order.

Labor leader Anthony Albanese quickly declared there was no difference whatsoever on the anti-China policy. In fact, in a keynote speech, he went further. He accused China of offering Russia relief from sanctions imposed by the US and its allies, and presented Labor as the party historically called to office during wartime to preside over the sharp geo-strategic shifts and domestic sacrifices needed for the "war effort."

Nevertheless, war hawks like Kitching and her IPAC colleagues have been agitating for even more provocative confrontations with China. This year alone, IPAC has issued statements demanding "legal investigations" into "crimes against humanity" in Xinjiang, World Bank divestment from the region and import bans, declaring that the US-led diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Olympics did not go far enough.

In the same vein, Kitching, whom Labor nominated to chair parliament's foreign affairs, defence and trade references committee, called for a "conscience vote" in parliament on declaring China in violation of UN protocols in Xinjiang, accused China of "belligerent and hegemonic behaviour in the international arena," and backed Washington's accusations that China was responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic.

To indicate their "warrior" status, the IPAC-aligned "Wolverines" have stickers on their parliamentary office doors showing four wolf claw marks. They have demanded crackdowns on university links to China and denounced various people for being "soft" on China. Kitching helped one of their members, Liberal Eric Abetz, to use her parliamentary committee to demand that three Chinese Australians denounce the Chinese Communist Party.

Echoing Rubio, they have accused China of "economic coercion" against Australia, and pushed for a lessening of economic dependence on China, which remains by far Australian capitalism's largest export

market, especially for lucrative iron ore.

IPAC issued a statement mourning the passing of a "beloved colleague." It said: "Kimberley devoted her work to the upholding of democracy and human rights internationally. She advocated tirelessly and fearlessly for the rights of oppressed peoples in Tibet, the Uyghur Region, Hong Kong and in China."

Kitching was simply a mouthpiece for Washington's cynical "human rights" campaigns used to vilify China in particular, while ignoring the systematic abuse of democratic rights in American allies such as Saudi Arabia. As was the case in the US invasions and military interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia, the vilification of Beijing is the preparation for a US-led war against China.

Kitching was a pro-US "lioness" to the end. Only last month, she obtained notoriety by using parliamentary privilege in a Senate hearing to name a Chinese-Australian businessman as the alleged "puppeteer" behind a "foreign interference plot" supposedly foiled by the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). To her last tweet, she was urging on the massive US-NATO build-up in Europe and its supply of weaponry to Ukraine.

The all-party glorification of Kitching is a warning of the poisonous atmosphere that the media and political establishment is seeking to whip up to justify frontline Australian involvement in US-led wars against Russia and China, and overcome the deep public opposition to such wars, which threaten the prospect of a third world war fought with nuclear weapons.



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