

The Canberra Times, Letters to the Editor, 19 June 2001

**Discrimination in citizenship**

I THINK that most Australians would feel a certain amount of pride at the news that the Australian-born Patricia Hewitt has been elevated to the position of Secretary for Trade in the UK Government (CT, May 12).

Her success, however, raises the question of dual-citizenship rights.

The Australian-born Ms Hewitt is able to hold dual Australian and UK nationalities because she is entitled to the latter (as her mother Lady Hewitt pointed out in your report) because of her ancestry. Fair enough.

However, if I was to acquire another citizenship, that same Act would strip me of my Australian citizenship.

This is because while I too am Australian-born, unlike Ms Hewitt I do not qualify for another citizenship by ancestry.

The present law allows Ms Hewitt to retain her Australian citizenship even though she serves in the Government of a foreign power, while it would strip me of my Australian citizenship if I merely took out the Portuguese citizenship of my girlfriend when we marry.

(Incidentally, that same law would allow my girlfriend to obtain Australian citizenship and retain her Portuguese citizenship!).

I am not suggesting that Ms Hewitt, or other dual citizens, should be forced to renounce one of their citizenships (as say, Singapore, forces people to do). As Lady Hewitt herself stated, there is no doubting the loyalty of the Hewitt family or others in the same position.

However, the Citizenship Act should not discriminate against millions of Australians by denying them a right and privilege permitted to millions of others.

LEE PATRICK FERRY

Australian National University