

Corporate media silent on Australia's party de-registration laws

Mike Head**7 September 2021**

Australia's corporate media outlets have maintained a virtual blackout on the blatantly anti-democratic electoral bills that were rushed through Australia's parliament on August 25-26 at record speed.

Above all, these laws seek to strip party registration from all political parties, including the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), that do not currently have parliamentary representation, by trebling the number of members—from 500 to 1,500—required to be officially recognised.

Behind the backs of the population, and in the midst of a spiralling COVID crisis, the Labor Party worked hand-in-glove with the Liberal-National Coalition government to ram through bills that seek to shore up the increasingly detested two-party duopoly.

Only two capital city newspapers, the *Canberra Times* and Perth's *West Australian*, published even brief reports about the passage of the bills. Their articles consisted of a syndicated news item produced by the Australian Associated Press (AAP), which barely mentioned, and downplayed, the party de-registration measures. Some regional papers also posted the AAP report.

“Small political parties” would merely “have a tougher test” to “get registered ahead of the next federal election,” the identical articles began. Apart from disparaging “small parties,” the articles hid the fact that existing parties would be removed from ballot papers if they failed to meet the three-month deadline to treble their official membership lists.

A similarly misleading distortion had appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and other Nine Entertainment outlets on August 12, when the government initially unveiled the bills. Buried deep in this solitary cursory article was a sentence on the party deregistration provisions. It said only “potential political parties”

would be required to meet a “higher membership threshold” of 1,500.

The only other corporate media coverage of the legislation came in the *Guardian*, which ran two articles in mid-August, when the bills were first tabled, reporting concerns by some of the “crossbench” parties in parliament, and one article on August 24 when Labor's parliamentary caucus voted to support the bills.

But not one article has appeared in any corporate media publication, including the *Guardian*, since the rapid passage of the bills.

The near-universal lack of reporting by the “mainstream media,” including the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, is clearly intended to keep ordinary people in the dark about these laws and their far-reaching implications, for fear of triggering public disgust and anger.

While these outlets loudly profess concern about democratic rights in places like Afghanistan and China, not a single article has appeared condemning, or even accurately reporting, the plan to de-register most political parties in Australia.

These laws are a bid to stifle opposition to the political establishment and its catastrophic profit-driven “live with the virus” policies that threaten hundreds, if not thousands, of working class lives in coming months.

Parties, such as the SEP, that are currently registered, will be stripped of their registration unless they provide new enlarged lists of members to the Australian Electoral Commission within three months of the laws coming into operation, that is, by December 2.

That short deadline has been set under conditions of surging Delta infections and widespread lockdowns, and with a federal election looming before May. This

underscores the connection between these laws and the pandemic.

The media is helping cover up the fact that these laws constitute a fundamental assault on basic democratic rights. They hand the power to the capitalist state itself to determine, on the basis of an arbitrary membership rule, which parties can stand candidates for federal elections, overriding the purpose of elections themselves.

The laws also ban parties from using certain names, notably “socialist” or “communist,” if a registered party has already claimed that label. This could allow parties to exercise political monopolies over these historic political terms, long associated with the struggles of the working class.

The *World Socialist Web Site* and the SEP are publishing articles and videos to alert and inform working class people about these laws and their significance.

We appeal to our readers to join us in the fight to defeat these electoral laws by becoming electoral members of the SEP and building support for a socialist program to eradicate COVID-19 and end the disastrous capitalist profit system.



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