

SEP electoral members denounce Australia's anti-democratic electoral laws and urge people to join the campaign

Our reporters
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has launched a campaign to defeat a series of anti-democratic laws that were rushed through the Australian parliament on August 26. Under conditions of an almost complete media blackout, Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Liberal-National Coalition government, fully backed by the Labor Party opposition, pushed the bills through both houses of parliament in a little over 24 hours.

The unprecedented measures demand that political parties, without parliamentary seats, must treble their membership lists from 500 to 1,500. This will affect 36 registered parties, including the SEP, which now must submit a new list of members in less than three months, under conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns across various states. All 36 parties will be deregistered if they do not meet the new requirements.

The SEP has begun a determined campaign to defeat these laws and for the repeal of any restriction on parties and individuals who seek to contest the elections. On Sunday 19 September, the SEP is holding an online public meeting to discuss its campaign and how to advance this fight. [Click here to register.](#)

At the same time, the SEP is appealing to all supporters and readers to become an SEP electoral member today, join the campaign and help the party retain its registration to defeat this attack.

The following comments are the first in a series of interviews and statements from electoral members opposing the new measures and voicing their determination to ensure the SEP remains a registered political party

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Alan Sutton, a warehouse worker from Moruya on the far south coast of New South Wales (NSW), was shocked by the swift passage of the new legislation and urged

workers and young people to speak out against it.

"I only came to know about the laws because I read about them on the WSWS," he said. "I thought it was outrageous and so I wrote to my member of parliament to complain. But I realised that the electoral laws had already gone through parliament, despite the fact I got onto it very quickly.

"Clearly they want to stifle any dissent. You cannot rely on the mainstream media to report anything. The WSWS is one of the very, very few places where you can find out about important things like this," he said.

"I sent emails out with the web site articles to several people I know. One texted me back and said she was very angry and was writing to complain to some or another parliamentarian. She has agreed to support the campaign against these laws by signing up as an electoral member."

Sutton, who became an electoral member in 2020, said there was a parallel between the Morrison government's new election laws and its recent decision to block public access to the National Cabinet minutes.

"The pandemic is giving them the opportunity to be anti-democratic, to hide things from view, to exclude from the ballot any dissenting voices, so that you can only vote for the established parties that are in parliament.

"But I think it is more than the pandemic. The pandemic has exacerbated things—it's the economic questions, the inequality. The inequality in society was there before the pandemic, but it was getting worse, and now it's worse again. That's the big issue."

Dr. Melvin Tan, an educator with 27 years' experience and a long-standing electoral member of the SEP from Melbourne, said the new election laws "discriminate against smaller political parties" and were an attack on working people.

"I believe the government is doing this to eliminate or

sideline other political parties and views from having a presence or voice in the Australian political landscape. This is a disservice to democracy,” he said.

“The media and government are happy to keep this change under the radar, because they know it is unfair, deceitful and undemocratic. The ruling political parties do not want any honest political critique on how poorly the pandemic is being managed by the federal or state governments. These laws serve to restrict political commentary.

“I believe in the importance of a party that speaks and acts in the interest of workers. The Labor Party claims to be the political representative of Australian workers, but it doesn’t want to be exposed by other political parties that are, in fact, truer to that proposition.”

Tan called on workers, young people and students to join the party: “I recommend being an SEP electoral member to support a workers’ party that provides Australians with an alternative political perspective to the major parties. I believe that the work of the SEP is important and worthy of support.”

Lance, who lives near Newcastle in NSW, became an electoral member in 2017, when he was 19 years old. A former student, he was recently employed in a café, but is now unemployed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The new laws are an attempt by the Australian government to stop the freedom of the people from electing who they want to be in government. They are an attack on people’s rights to choose political representatives,” he said.

“The ruling elite is aware that the general public is very hostile toward the two-party system. Regular people are looking for an alternative to the major parties. The elite is trying to restrict and reduce the political options, because it is scared that workers are turning away from the established parties and will look for another party to protect their interests.”

Scott Molloy, a network technician at the University of Newcastle, north of Sydney, said: “These bills are directly subtracting from the democratic rights of the individual to make an informed vote.

“Anyone worth their political kudos has long ago realised the writing on the wall for the existing duopoly. The passage of these bills shows that the two main parties are both on the same team, and can only present the illusion of choice between them.

“It also shows they are deeply scared for their political future, that of growing numbers of dissatisfied voters, which begins in smaller parties. By seeking to turn these

oppositional parties into ‘no-named’ options, they hope to assuage their concerns. It is an attempt to defang the people before they use their fangs.”

David Beeman is a semi-retired maritime worker, electoral member and long-time supporter of the SEP, and its forerunner, the Socialist Labour League (SLL). He met the SLL and backed its struggle against the anti-working-class Hawke and Keating Labor governments from 1983 until 1996.

“This legislation is totally anti-democratic and designed to stop smaller parties from being represented. It is absolutely counter to democracy. You should be able to call yourself whatever you like and be put on a ballot.

“I also oppose the fact that people already have to hand over their name and address to the government [for the party to be registered]. It’s supposed to be a secret ballot, but they don’t seem to care about that democratic aspect of it.

“There’s no doubt that every measure that is being enacted now, whether its so-called controlling of the pandemic, or unemployment or housing, is bound up with increasing forms of authoritarianism. It has nothing to do with the majority of peoples’ interests, but everything to do with generating profits for a tiny number of people.”

Beeman said government responses to COVID-19 exposed their “priority of making profits over people’s health, welfare and security.”

Workers are treated like “cannon fodder” and are being driven back to work to generate profits. “‘Living with COVID’ is absolutely homicidal and really the most careless attitude towards people’s lives,” he added.

“There’s no future for the working class in voting for the two-party system,” Beeman said, and urged people to join the campaign and become SEP electoral members.

“What’s needed is the building of a party capable of dealing with these huge tasks—the pandemic or climate change or social housing—all of these issues. It’s critical that people understand that socialism is the only way forward. Otherwise, there’s really only a barbaric future, such as the ruthlessness you can see with the pandemic.”



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