

Defeat Australia's new anti-democratic electoral laws. Hands off the name "socialist"!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) unequivocally opposes key provisions in the anti-democratic electoral laws rammed through the Australian parliament last month that allow the electoral authorities and any previously registered political party to veto the use of common political party names, including the word "socialist."

As a matter of fundamental political principle, the SEP objects in the strongest manner to handing to any capitalist state agency, including the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC), the power to determine which parties have the basic democratic right to use widely-known and historically significant names, such as socialist and communist.

We also oppose any move by any other political party claiming the name socialist to attempt to establish a legal monopoly over that name. The Socialist Equality Party will not seek any such legal veto ourselves, and we call on all other parties and groups identifying themselves as "socialist" to publicly declare likewise.

The electoral laws that the Liberal-National Coalition and the Labor Party opposition combined to push through parliament in just over 24 hours on August 25–26, behind the backs of the population, not only attempt to de-register most political parties without parliamentary members, by suddenly requiring them to submit lists of 1,500 members—trebling the previous rule—by December 2.

The legislation also prohibits the AEC from registering a party—even if it supplies the names of 1,500 members—if its name contains a word that is part of the name of an earlier registered party, unless it first obtains the "written consent" of that other party.

In part, this reactionary provision creates a veto power over any already-claimed title, such as Liberal, Labor and Green. That is a blatant bid to shore up the

existing parties of the political establishment in the face of the ever-deepening political disaffection produced by their decades-long imposition of the dictates of the capitalist ruling elite.

However, this law has a particular purpose also in seeking to legally restrict and control the use of "socialist" and "communist"—names associated with the strivings and struggles of the working class internationally for two centuries.

Under conditions of mounting political disaffection, intensified by the failure of capitalist governments everywhere to protect people from the COVID-19 catastrophe, this is an attempt to block, curtail or confuse discussion about the necessity for socialism as the only answer to the subordination of public health and lives to the generation of corporate profit and the accumulation of private wealth.

Both terms—socialist and communist—belong to the common heritage of humanity, with their earliest roots going back thousands of years. They are not, and must not become, the private property of any political party.

Socialism has been associated broadly with the struggles and aspirations of the working class and the fight against the capitalist profit system since the early nineteenth century, when the industrial revolution led to the creation and growth of a vast working class and workers' movement. Originating from the ancient Latin word *sociare*, which means to combine or to share, it became synonymous with the fight against the poverty, oppression and yawning social inequality inherently produced by the capitalist mode of production.

Communism, a term made famous by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in publishing *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, has equally become widely associated with the working-class movements that, in

Engels' words, "proclaimed the necessity of total social change" rather than illusory efforts to reform or modify capitalism. It is also derived from Latin, from *communis*, which can be translated to "of or for the community," and has been long associated with the quest for a classless society based on egalitarianism and common ownership of the productive forces.

These terms remain of ever-greater importance and interest to the working people around the globe, despite the betrayals and political crimes carried out by false claimants to their names, such as the "social democratic" Australian Labor Party, various pseudo-left "socialist" formations and the Stalinised Communist Parties that resulted from the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union under the pressure of the global capitalist powers.

The clarification of the lessons of these betrayals and of the nature of genuine socialism must be the subject of democratic discussion among workers and young people, free from bans on party names by the government.

The new laws are sweeping in their anti-democratic implications. They further allow a registered political party to object to another party's name, at any time, regardless of the party's date of registration, thus opening the way for challenges even after a party has been registered.

The legislation does not specifically nominate any names to be protected from use. The only exemptions to proscription are for "function" words (like "the"), collective nouns for people (like "party"), the name of a country, the word "country" or a recognised geographical place in Australia, and the word "democratic."

According to the legislation's official explanatory memorandum, "the word 'democratic' is treated as an exception, because it has a unique position as both being of widespread historical use in political party naming conventions and being directly related to the intrinsic function of all Australian political organisations."

That is sheer hypocrisy—invoking the name "democratic" collectively for a parliamentary elite that is moving to curtail basic democratic rights.

Without party registration, parties and their election candidates cannot identify their political affiliations on ballot papers. They have to nominate without any party

name, or as unexplained "independents." This denies the elementary right of parties to stand candidates in order to campaign across the country for their political programs, as well as the essential right of electors to know the policies of candidates.

In the most immediate political crisis, 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.

Above all, the legislation constitutes a drive to derail discussion on the genuine socialist alternative fought for by the SEP and its sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) through the *World Socialist Web Site*, including for the global eradication of COVID-19.

The SEP has launched a campaign to demand the repeal of these laws and all restrictions on the democratic right of parties and individuals to stand in elections. At the same time, we appeal to all our supporters and readers: Become an electoral member of the SEP to help us retain our registration and defeat this attack.



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