

Enthusiastic response to fight against Australia's anti-democratic election laws at SEP public meeting

Our reporter
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) intensified its campaign against Australia's new anti-democratic electoral laws with a well-attended online public meeting on Sunday September 19. Those logging in came from across Australia, as well as from New Zealand, Britain and the US. Many were attending their first SEP meeting with numerous enthusiastic chat messages and several deciding after the event to apply to become electoral members.

Streamed live on Zoom, the event was addressed by Oscar Grenfell, national convenor of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) and SEP national committee member; SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp and Eric London, SEP (US) national committee member and a leading writer for the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The detailed reports and the lengthy Q&A discussion can be watched in full below. Those determined to fight the government's reactionary laws will be ably equipped in this struggle if they assimilate and use the analysis presented at the meeting. We urge readers to widely share the video on social media and other online platforms.

Sunday's meeting was the first in a series of events by the SEP to mobilise workers, students and others against the so-called Electoral Legislation Amendment (Party Registration Integrity) Bill 2021. The amendment was rushed through federal parliament with Labor Party support late last month amid a virtual media blackout and behind the backs of the population.

Under the new measures, political parties without a seat in parliament, including the SEP and 35 others, must submit a list of 1,500 members to the Australian Electoral Commission, triple the previous requirement, before December 3. If they fail to do so they will be deregistered and unable to stand candidates in federal elections with their party names on ballot papers. The new laws, which are a blatant attempt to prop-up the discredited establishment parties, are part of an escalating assault on basic democratic rights around the world.

SEP national committee member Mike Head, who chaired the meeting, pointed out that the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) now has the power to de-register parties that have names

such as "socialist" or "communist," if a previously registered party has claimed that label. "The SEP is demanding the repeal of these laws and the removal of all restrictions on the right of parties and individuals to run in elections," he said.

SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp told the meeting that the new laws "did not come out of the blue." This attack, she said, could only be understood within the context of the worsening COVID-19 pandemic, and last Thursday's announcement that Australia was joining AUKUS, a provocative new military alliance with the United States and the United Kingdom directed against China.

"The US, with Australia and Britain at its flanks, is spearheading a military confrontation with a nuclear-armed rival and the Australian population is being placed at the front lines of such a conflict," Crisp said. This extraordinary decision, she continued, was not discussed in the Australian and UK parliaments, or the US Congress before being announced.

"It was not put to the Australian population during an election. It was not reported by any government official or media outlet. No one was given a say in this. This is the method of rule which characterises this country and governments internationally," she added.

Crisp denounced the AEC's power to reject party registration submissions if the organisation's name contained a word used by an already registered party, unless written consent is provided.

"The fact there are at present three registered parties with the name socialist means that the first registered, which appears to be Socialist Alliance, can prevent the other two from standing under a name which in the case of the Socialist Equality Party has been used for almost 50 years.

"The capitalist state has in this case effectively deputised Socialist Alliance with the power to strip the SEP of the use of its name. The SEP has already declared it will not veto the use of the word socialist, which is a principle, and calls on all other parties to do the same. To date Socialist Alliance has not responded," Crisp said.

The speaker reviewed other attacks on democratic rights, warning that these are "a prelude" to war. The descent into war,

she continued, could only be prevented by mobilising the international working class on a revolutionary socialist program to put an end to the capitalist system now threatening the very existence of mankind. The SEP was the only organisation advancing this perspective, Crisp said, appealing to all in attendance to join.

Oscar Grenfell said, “It’s no accident that one of the Australian ruling elite’s most significant attacks on democratic rights coincides with the deepest medical and political crisis of the past eighty years, and the open adoption by capitalist governments of policies that can only be described as homicidal.”

Grenfell gave a detailed exposure of the criminal response to COVID-19 by Australian governments—state and federal, Liberal-National and Labor—and their international counterparts, who have all opposed measures to eradicate the deadly disease, instead declaring that it was necessary to “live with the virus.”

The fight against Australia’s electoral laws, he continued, was inseparable from the fight to mobilise the working class in defence of health, safety and for a scientifically-grounded program aimed at eradicating COVID.

Grenfell reviewed the desperate state of Australia’s public hospital system, the dangerous situation facing health workers, the growing hostility of teachers who are being told to return to unsafe schools and face-to-face classes and industrial action taken by other sections of the working class.

“The emerging movement of workers and young people faces major political issues. Experience has demonstrated that not a single step forward can be taken within the straitjacket of Labor and the unions... The unions are using the pandemic to take their decades-long collaboration with governments and the employers to new heights and are now collaborating in the drive to lift lockdowns, he warned.

“The fight for the social rights of the working class, including to health and life itself, requires new organisations of struggle, including independent rank-and-file committees in all the schools, hospitals and factories,” Grenfell said. “The fight against the pandemic is also the fight to build a socialist movement of the working class, and why these laws must be defeated and the SEP registered so we can advance this perspective as widely as possible,” he concluded.

Eric London began his remarks by wondering what the great American author and satirist Mark Twain would have made of the Australian parliament’s cynical explanation as to why prior state approval is not required for parties seeking registration to use the word “democratic,” as opposed to words like socialist.

Imagine what Twain would have thought, London said, of the legislation’s claim that “the word ‘democratic’ has a unique position as being directly related to the intrinsic function of all Australian political organisations” even as the government declared that only one party could use the word socialist in its name.

“In the twenty years since the events of September 11, 2001, the world has heard a lot about the glory of capitalist democracy,” London said, before reviewing the bloody human toll unleashed against millions around the world by US imperialism.

“Through their criminal wars, the US ruling class, with the active participation of the ruling classes of Britain and Australia, has sucked the last domestic life out of whatever remained of their home ‘democracies’ before the wars began” he stated.

“The United States claims for itself the power to assassinate American citizens without warrants or trials, to spy on the entire world’s population, to grant its police a license to kill. Twenty years of cultivating a political climate of nationalism, militarism and xenophobia poured the fuel on the fire that Donald Trump lit and fanned.”

“The ruling class attempts to ban the Socialist Equality Party from the political marketplace of ideas,” London said, warning that the financial aristocracy learns the lessons of history.

“The conclusion it draws today is that the great masses of working people can have no voice whatsoever in official capitalist politics. But we will fight for every inch of our democratic rights, knowing that we are defending much more than the right to mark the SEP on an election ballot.

“We are defending the democratic and social rights of the entire working class, that powerful social force at whose feet the task of defending democratic rights falls,” he declared.

The reports were followed by about 45 minutes of Q&A discussion on a range of questions and a collection for the SEP monthly fund of over \$4,000. Questions were asked and answered about the supposed “in home treatment” of COVID-19 by state health departments, vaccine passports and the attitude of the Greens to the new laws. Another attendee asked whether another French revolution was necessary. One requested further information about revelations that the top US military general warned his Chinese counterpart that Donald Trump could launch a military attack on China in the weeks after he lost the presidential election.



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