

“These new laws are breaching human rights”—SEP electoral members condemn new Australian laws

Our reporters
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New layers of workers, students and young people are applying to become electoral members of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), voicing their concerns about the anti-democratic laws rushed through parliament last month, by the federal Liberal-National government and the Labor Party.

The comments below are from some of those who participated in the SEP’s recent online public meeting, which explained the reactionary character of the new measures, why they were introduced, and how to fight them.

The laws, requiring parties without parliamentary representation to treble their membership, in less than three months, in order to remain registered, are a blatant attempt to clear the ballot in the lead-up to an election and amid immense social and political opposition in the working class.

The SEP urges all supporters and *World Socialist Web Site* readers to study the party’s socialist and internationalist program—against war, inequality and in defence of all democratic rights—and apply to become electoral members.

Jessica, a 22-year-old law student from Western Sydney University, found out about the laws, and the SEP’s campaign against them, whilst doing research for her law course and decided to become an electoral member.

“I read about what the party stands for and I agreed with it,” she said. “I think it’s important to achieve social equality and give a voice to the working class, especially considering the fact that it doesn’t have a voice in modern society. These laws go against the Australian democratic system. They prevent people from making informed decisions about political parties,

and prevent freedom of expression,” she added.

Shortly after last Sunday’s meeting she sent a tightly-argued legal explanation of how Australia’s new laws violate fundamental rights. An extract from her email is below:

I object to the enactment of the Electoral Legislation Amendment (Party Registration Integrity) Bill 2021. The Bill infringes upon fundamental democratic values, such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to association with others, and the right to political participation. As opposed to liberal-democratic principles, ingrained within Australian society, there exist other principles, which are fascinated by the institutions of the free market, as Gleeson and Low, 2000 provide. This neoliberal tenet is offensive to Parliamentary democracy, as it provides that members of Parliament are bound to the sectional interests that help in empowering the government as Heywood 2003 and Robinson 2006 provide...

The Bill alleges to have been considered against human rights implications, including the right to freedom of expression under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 22 in regard to freedom of association and Article 25 in relation to political participation. The conclusion, which the explanatory memorandum provides, is that the Bill is compatible with human rights because, to the extent it may limit human rights, those limitations are reasonable, necessary and

proportionate.

People should have the right to choose who they wish to vote for, to make free and informed decisions on which political parties they wish to associate themselves with, and freedom of expression must be upheld. This Bill, if passed as legislation, would infringe upon Australian democracy by limiting certain rights of citizens, which they should be able to continue enjoying, which should be safeguarded within an alleged democratic system such as Australia's. The way in which the Bill was introduced was with a total lack of transparency, rushed, and without any care for those affected. It is hard to believe that a Bill, which was rushed such as this one, was carefully measured against competing human rights. Our system of democracy is slipping from our hands, and that is why we must continue to speak up against such attempts by the government to limit or constrain our rights, rights that provide the foundation of our democratic system.

Millicent, a 22-year-old first-year fine arts student at the University of Melbourne also attended the SEP meeting. She became an SEP electoral member after participating in online meetings held by the party's youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE).

"Speakers at Sunday's meeting used stats showing how the major parties were losing votes. They're not getting the votes they want, and especially now, when younger people want to vote for a socialist candidate. I imagine the major parties are not fans of having a socialist party on the ballot," she said.

Millicent said the new laws were "not very democratic at all," and "a ploy to keep the two-party system going by relinquishing any kind of power from smaller parties..."

"Something mentioned in the meeting that I didn't know about was how the SEP's registration can be blocked for using the word 'socialist,' if there's already a registered party which calls itself socialist and they object... That's really bizarre.

"I don't know whether most people in Australia really consider the dynamic between Liberal and Labor

as just being between "right" and "left" but it's not true. After all, Labor and Liberal often work together in a sort of coalition. We have to get rid of that power, which the two parties control, because honestly, they're so similar," she said.

Kobra, a 22-year-old student of Afghan descent at Sydney's Macquarie University, said last Sunday's public meeting was "really insightful." She became an electoral member earlier this year.

"These laws are really anti-democratic and were passed by the government behind our backs. Nothing was really discussed in the public. We didn't know anything about it because it wasn't reported in the media," Kobra said, and added, "We can't rely on the media to tell us anything truthful about what's going on in the government, and you can't trust the government anymore. The only thing that makes sense is that the government must be doing this deliberately, so that the public doesn't find out."

Kobra said the laws were linked to a range of issues: "The meeting discussed the fact that this legislation was passed at this specific point in time, with the pandemic causing so much distrust and death. The Australian government is trying to take advantage of this. One thing I didn't consider, but it's so plain and obvious, is that they're expecting smaller parties to find another 1,000 members, when we're in a pandemic. You can't hold meetings or gatherings. This all ties together."

Referring to the new AUKUS alliance, Kobra said, "With the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the reason the government has signed this treaty with the UK and America is to make preparations for war. That's where the government's focus is; that's what they prioritise over people's health and our opinions; that's what benefits them, that's what serves their interests."



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