

# Why is the pseudo-left silent on Australia's anti-democratic electoral laws?

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Australia's pseudo-left organisations including Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance have said virtually nothing about anti-democratic electoral laws that were rushed through the federal parliament by the Liberal-National Coalition government and the Labor Party opposition in August.

The legislation is blatantly aimed at buttressing the discredited two-party set-up, amid widespread social and political opposition. It trebles the required number of members that parties must submit from 500 to 1,500 to be registered and have their name appear on ballot papers. It seeks to deny the right of workers to know who they are voting for and in particular the opportunity to vote for a socialist alternative.

Despite the obvious significance of the laws, and the fact that their own electoral activities are impacted, neither Socialist Alliance nor Socialist Alternative has waged a campaign demanding their repeal.

A Google search of Socialist Alternative's *Red Flag* website does not return a single article even referencing the new measures. Instead, *RedFlag* has occasionally embedded appeals for people to join Socialist Alternative's parochial electoral front, the Victorian Socialists.

The entirety of the Victorian Socialists' response is the following statement: "The Liberal government, with the backing of Labor, has just passed new anti-democratic laws that are aimed at protecting the establishment parties and preventing any minor party challenge. Join now."

The only conclusion that one can reach is that Socialist Alternative and Victorian Socialists uncritically accepts the anti-democratic electoral framework of state supervision and interference in the activities of political parties.

Socialist Alliance has issued a single 400-word party

statement on the legislation in the past two months, after a scanty news report in its *Green Left Weekly* paper in early September. The statement did criticize the laws as an attack on democratic rights by the major parties, but did not call for their abolition. Socialist Alliance's appeals for the electoral process to be made more "representative" have not been followed by any campaign.

While they may describe themselves as "socialist," and even occasionally as "revolutionary," the pseudo-left organisations are hostile to any fight for the independent interests of the working class against the political establishment.

The pseudo-lefts speak for an affluent upper middle-class layer, seeking to advance its own interests within the framework of capitalism and the existing political set-up—in particular through various forms of identity policies based on gender, race and sexual orientation.

The orientation of Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance is not to the working class but to the trade unions that have been instrumental in policing workers and assisting governments and corporations to attack wages, jobs, conditions and essential social services.

The political perspective of these organisations is graphically exposed at election time when they invariably direct support to Labor or the Greens as a "lesser evil" compared to the Coalition parties.

In reality, the lack of any significant difference between the regressive policies of successive Coalition and Labor governments is precisely why a significant proportion of voters are voting for so-called minor parties—a trend that the new legislation is seeking to arrest through heavy-handed means.

In line with its support for the Greens, Socialist Alliance favourably quoted Greens senator Larissa Waters and her mealy-mouthed criticisms of the laws

when they were passed, in its article. Her party leader Adam Bandt remained silent, and the Greens have said nothing since. And not surprisingly Socialist Alliance has effectively done the same!

The Socialist Alliance statement on the new laws boasted that its party's "bona fides are well established," citing the fact that three of its members sit on local government councils. There they collaborate closely with the Greens and advance a parochial "local" politics that has nothing to do with socialism, the working class or opposition to the profit system.

The Victorian Socialists has a similar orientation. It appeals to public discontent and anger over issues such as failing public infrastructure including healthcare and education, but encourages the illusion that these can be patched up within the framework of capitalism and the existing political set-up.

Earlier this year Socialist Alternative leader Corey Oakley announced the party could contest the next federal election, as a means of enhancing its prospects of winning a seat in the following Victorian state election.

Outlining the party's rationale, Oakley declared: "Imagine if we had had a socialist in the Victorian parliament this last year." The party would have had a "voice in the mainstream debate," to "defend" Victorian Labor Premier Daniel Andrews from the "lunatic right," while criticising some of his policies "from the left."

In other words, the sum total of Socialist Alternative's political imagination is to serve as a loyal opposition to the state's Labor government. Those described as the "lunatic right" did indeed attack Andrews for maintaining limited lockdowns in an attempt to suppress the COVID-19 pandemic. But Andrews has now joined the "lunatic right," and in line with corporate demands is rapidly lifting all public safety even as infections reach new records.

Why are the pseudo-lefts silent on the new anti-democratic election laws? The answer is obvious: they are tied by a thousand threads to the political establishment and do not wish to disrupt their relations with Labor, the Greens and the trade unions.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) has no illusions in parliamentary democracy but uses the arena to fight for its socialist and internationalist perspective against all of the parties of the political establishment. And it

defends to the hilt the existing limited democratic rights of the working class to have its political voice heard. The legislation is part of the far broader attacks on basic democratic rights.

The Socialist Labour League, the SEP's forerunner, opposed the legislation when it was first enacted in 1983 and it opposes the new laws which are a further step towards eliminating opposition to the two-party system. Join our campaign to repeal the legislation and join the SEP as an electoral member to show your support for a socialist movement against the depredations of capitalism including the dangers posed by the pandemic, war, climate change and widening social inequality.



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