

SEP holds online meeting to fight Australia's new anti-democratic election laws

Our reporter

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held an online public meeting on Sunday, pushing ahead with its campaign to inform and mobilise young people and workers against Australia's new anti-democratic electoral laws. Those participating came from state capitals and regional centres across Australia, as well as from New Zealand, Sri Lanka and America's west coast.

The more than two-hour event was addressed by SEP national committee members Oscar Grenfell, national convenor of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE); Sue Phillips, national convenor of the Committee for Public Education (CFPE); and SEP national secretary Cheryl Crisp.

Over the next week we will publish the speakers' contributions and urge readers to share these, and the video above, as widely as possible on social media and discuss them with colleagues, friends and relatives.

The SEP meeting was the second organised by the party since Prime Minister Scott Morrison's Liberal-National coalition government, with the Labor Party's vehement support, passed its Electoral Legislation Amendment (Party Registration Integrity) Bill in late August.

Political parties without a seat in parliament, including the SEP and 35 others, must now submit a list of 1,500 members to the Australian Electoral Commission, triple the previous requirement, before December 2. 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 amendment is a crude attempt to prop up the discredited establishment political parties and block the population, and young people in particular, from seeking a socialist alternative to the corrupt and outmoded profit system. The corporate media and the unions are maintaining a wall of silence about the laws. Australia's pseudo-left groups have barely uttered a word about the measures, let alone denounced or explained their reactionary character.

The SEP's warnings that the new election laws would be followed by more anti-democratic attacks were confirmed last week by the government's Electoral Legislation

Amendment (Voter Integrity) Bill 2021.

The so-called Voter ID law is intended to disenfranchise large numbers of working-class voters, forcing anyone who wants to cast a ballot to produce official identification and be subjected to questioning by election officials before being allowed to vote. The government wants it legislated by parliament before December 2.

SEP assistant national secretary Max Boddy opened Sunday's meeting by reviewing the rising global and Australian COVID-19 death toll and infections. The catastrophe was escalating out of control, he said, because governments everywhere were placing profit before lives, reopening schools and removing all limited safety measures, as demanded by the capitalist class.

Boddy screened a 12-minute video containing highlights from the October 24 webinar "How to Stop the Pandemic" sponsored by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The powerful event involved presentations from leading scientists from around the world explaining the necessity to fight the global elimination of the coronavirus.

IYSSE national convenor Grenfell explained how and why the new electoral laws were centrally aimed against young people, now being radicalised by years of unrelenting government and employer attacks.

"Official claims that young people don't die of COVID are a politically-motivated lie," Grenfell said. He reviewed the rising COVID-19 death toll and infection rates among youth. The high rates, he continued, resulted because young people were the most likely to be in low-paid, casual, precarious and unsafe work.

Grenfell said there was opposition to "the social crisis, the adoption of murderous pandemic policies in the interests of the rich, and the other existential threats posed by the capitalist system—from the climate disaster to the danger of a nuclear war—that would imperil humanity's future. The government and Labor know this opposition exists and its one of the central reasons they have imposed these anti-democratic electoral laws."

CFPE national convenor Phillips told the meeting that COVID-19 was being allowed to infect students, teachers and families because governments, with trade union support, were reopening schools and removing all health restrictions while suppressing information about the real situation.

Warnings made by the CFPE early last month that the Victorian and New South Wales governments were putting the lives of students and educators at risk had been confirmed by surging infections in schools and childcare centres.

In the past month about 500 schools had been closed in those two states due to infections, Phillips said, but this information was not being made public. Such was the demand for accurate information that data collected by the CFPE on school closures and published on its Facebook page was being read and shared by thousands of teachers and parents.

The teachers' unions, Phillips said, had "unquestioningly echoed and imposed" every government announcement throughout the pandemic.

Their response was to "say as little publicly as possible, post nothing on social media... present COVID safety as a matter for individual schools and teachers to address on a case-by-case basis and intimidate people opposing the reopenings, above all teacher-members of the Committee for Public Education.

"That is why the CFPE has fought for school staff to form rank-and-file safety committees in every school, independent of the unions—democratic organisations to develop the widest public discussion, and based on the most accurate up-to-date epidemiological scientific research."

SEP national secretary Crisp, the final speaker, began by explaining that the party's campaign was not based on any illusions in parliamentary rule.

Parliamentary democracy, she said, is one form of class rule. "There are others and they are being brought forward, most sharply in the US, where fascist forces were incited and organised by Trump and his followers to overturn the 2020 election and establish a fascist form of rule in America..."

"The SEP has a broader perspective. The campaign for our electoral members is part of the fight for the independent mobilisation of the working class, and for the break from the confines of parliamentary democracy and the organisations which perpetuate it."

Crisp contrasted the SEP's response to the pandemic and the electoral laws to the reaction of Australia's pseudo-left parties. Referring to the October 24 webinar hosted by the WSWs involving scientists and workers, she pointed out that no other political organisation had held such a discussion with ordinary people to explain, "what this virus is, how it developed, how it transmits and how it can be

stopped..."

"Until the past few weeks, if one were to read the pages of *Red Flag*, *Green Left Weekly*, *Jacobin* and others, you would be forgiven for thinking there was no pandemic, no health crisis and no attack on democratic rights—and certainly no electoral laws.

"Socialist Alternative in its belated articles on COVID-19 presented it from an utterly nationalist standpoint. In the course of the articles not one politician, political party, union or union leader or even a government is named, let alone indicted for the policies they have enacted.

"These are not just errors or omissions but a political perspective. That is to block any independent opposition from workers to the program of the ruling class and the political parties which represent them."

Crisp concluded her presentation by referencing the eruption of strikes by American workers, as part of a growing movement of the international working class. She stressed that the fight to eliminate COVID-19 and in defence of democratic rights had to be based on an orientation to working class and a socialist program. She appealed to all those in attendance to join and build the SEP.

An extended question and answer session followed and over \$2,800 was donated in a collection for the SEP's Monthly Fund.

In the past two months, the party has held two public meetings, published 39 articles and 16 videos, including over 50 interviews, and held three special meetings with electoral members. The party will intensify this level of political analysis and work in the final month of the campaign and urges all WSWs readers and supporters to become electoral members and join this campaign.



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