“People are getting killed and the government is indifferent”—SEP (Australia) electoral members support campaign to eliminate COVID-19

Our reporters
5 November 2021

Last Sunday the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) held on online public meeting entitled “A socialist program to eliminate COVID-19. Become an electoral member of the SEP today” as part of its fight against Australia’s anti-democratic electoral laws.

The laws, rushed through federal parliament in late August with Labor Party support, target the SEP and 35 other parties without a member of parliament. Under the new measures these parties must submit a list of 1,500 members, treble the previous number, by December 2 or face deregistration and their candidates stripped of the democratic right to have their party name on ballot papers.

The SEP electoral members featured below voice their opposition to these laws and comment on the October 24 WSWS webinar “How to end the pandemic .”

To join the SEP’s campaign against the legislation sign up as an electoral member today.

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Shanta, 71, is a long-time SEP supporter and electoral member. Born in Sri Lanka, he was politicised in student struggles during the 1960s and later worked as a chemical engineer in several countries.

“I joined a footwear company but always had disputes with them. They had a provident fund—like superannuation funds in Australia—many of these sorts of companies failed to make payments. They cheated workers,” he said.

Shanta migrated to Australia in 2000 and began working as a machine operator at Gale Pacific which manufactured shade cloth. The company then moved its production to China, sacking nearly 200 workers.

“I attended a village fair in 2005 and the Labor Party were there. I asked them about [then Labor leader] Mark Latham saying he would withdraw troops from the Middle East but was kicked out soon after. I asked whose interests does the Labor Party serve? They said, ‘That’s a very good question’ and I noted that when people respond that way in Australia, they don’t have a reply.

“Labor and the Liberals are the different sides of the same coin. They know they are losing support and are scared. They’re especially targeting us because they sense the danger of the SEP,” he said.

Commenting on October 24 WSWS sponsored webinar, Shanta said, “Dr. Deepti Gurdasani explained beautifully about the situation facing children in the UK. I’m personally concerned about my grandson. He’s 11 years old and he’s not eligible to get the vaccine yet but they want him to go to school.

“My wife is a health care worker, they have seminars and knowledge about the use of PPE, but children have none of that. They don’t understand and they’re the innocent victims. People are getting killed and the government is indifferent.

“You can keep the pandemic at bay with vaccinations and isolation. The mutations can be controlled that way but if different countries have different policies, it can never be controlled. It’s a globalised world and there needs to be one policy for the entire world. That’s what I believe the SEP is advocating,” he said.

“Governments are isolating any media that wants to reveal the truth to the people,” he added. “They’re

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particularly targeting Julian Assange because he did it in the most advanced manner. The media used the discredited sexual scandal to disgrace him. They want to keep people away from these type of whistleblowers. I fully support the SEP's campaign in defence of Julian Assange."

Berhe, originally from Eritrea, is a welfare worker in Melbourne. He made the following comments after Sunday's meeting.

"In relation to the coronavirus, protecting society, protecting the people, is more appropriate than thinking about the individual or approaching things on an individualist basis," he said.

"The rights of those who don't want to be vaccinated cannot outweigh the rights of people who need to be protected from the virus. I agree with an elimination strategy and the need for the necessary investments for this, rather than politicising the pandemic."

Asked about the new anti-democratic electoral laws Berhe said, "It's a systematic way of eliminating those who advocate on behalf of the majority, the working class. The basic message I took from the meeting is we must raise our voice high so we can remain registered federally.

"It's critical for the Socialist Equality Party to be registered and able to discuss the political situation with the working class. It's not appropriate for the authorities to continually raise the minimum threshold for membership but now that they've done so, we must try and meet it. The campaign is important being able to convey a socialist message—the more members the party has, the more we can do that," Berhe said and explained that he would ask a work colleague to become an electoral member.

"This is all about social justice. When I was at university in Africa, we were very radical and socialist and used to talk about the Vietnam struggle and other world developments," he said. I've now heard about the AUKUS [Australia-UK and US military strategic] agreement and there's the danger of incitement for conflict. Who suffers when the elephants fight in the grass? It is ordinary people."

John Isherwood, 72, a retired tiler, said the new electoral laws were adopted by Australia's establishment parliamentary parties because "they don't like minor parties and don't want minority governments. I was a Labor supporter all my life but since retiring I've had time to look into things. The Labor Party are neo-liberals—one foot out and one foot in."

"I think an elimination policy regarding the virus is very good," he continued. "The Andrews [Victorian state] government has suddenly turned around and is now reopening. It's beyond me because we know what's happening in England—and what will happen here—and it's horrific.

"I agree with what was said at the October 31 meeting. Governments are putting finance ahead of people's lives. The virus has been used for the most enormous shift from the poor to the rich in the history of capitalism. All the quantitative-easing money has gone straight into the share market while wages haven't gone up for nine years," he said.

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