

Sri Lankan workers support SEP (Australia) campaign against anti-democratic electoral laws

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We publish below two statements in support of the Socialist Equality Party's campaign against Australia's anti-democratic electoral laws. The statements were issued by action committees working among Sri Lankan teachers and health workers. The Socialist Equality Parties in Sri Lanka and Australia are sister parties of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement.

The campaign being waged by SEP members in Australia is a globally important initiative for workers, youth and all those committed to the defence of democratic rights.

In late August, Australia's Liberal-National coalition government passed an anti-democratic law mandating all currently registered political parties without parliamentary representation to submit a list of 1,500 members, up from 500 members, by December 2 or they will be deregistered. The law was passed within 24 hours with the support of the opposition Labor Party and amid the silence of the pseudo-left.

Under the new measures, 36 political parties, including the SEP, could be deregistered.

In addition, the laws are essentially anti-socialist. Even if the parties submit a list of 1,500 members, still their application can be rejected if the party's name shares terms such as "socialist" and "communist" with another already registered party. They would require the written permission of the first party registered to use these words.

An SEP statement published on September 3 explains the political and social roots of this anti-democratic attack: "The legislation is part of a global assault on basic democratic rights and a turn to authoritarian forms of rule amid the worsening

COVID-19 pandemic and working-class opposition to the 'reopening' policies pursued by capitalist governments to boost profits at the expense of millions of lives."

Similar moves are being prepared by the Sri Lankan government of President Gotabaya Rajapakse which confronts a deepening economic crisis and rising social opposition exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Rajapakse administration is planning next year to introduce a new constitution and a new electoral system. No details have been released, but according to comments by Rajapakse and other ruling party leaders, there will be moves to scrap the proportional electoral system and laws introduced to make it difficult for "small parties" to register. The government could also introduce measures to deregister these parties. These are moves towards autocratic rule.

Teachers-Students-Parents Safety Committee of Sri Lanka

We, as the Teachers-Students-Parents Safety Committee (TSPSC) in Sri Lanka, fully oppose the new electoral laws rammed through the Australian parliament to deregister parties without seats in parliament. This reactionary law, introduced by the Liberal-National Coalition government and passed with the support of the opposition Labor Party, is a bipartisan attempt to block the opposition emerging from the bottom of society against the entire bourgeois ruling class.

It is clear that one of the main objectives of these measures is to suppress the opposition from the working class to the rapid spread of COVID-19 in Australia due to the premature reopening policies now being pursued by the Australian government. The

working class as a whole must be thoughtful of the impact of these new election laws on the Socialist Equality Party, the only movement working to provide a correct political expression to rising popular opposition based on socialist policies.

In Sri Lanka, the Gotabhaya Rajapakse government is playing a similar reactionary role. Last Friday he issued a special gazette banning strikes by employees in the Ports, Petroleum, Postal, Railways industries as well as in the Transport Board, goods and passenger services and several government institutions, naming these sectors as essential services.

The TSPSC has been fighting to develop the political consciousness of Sri Lankan teachers, which is crucial for them to be a part of a unified political offensive against government reaction. We urge workers, youth and students in Australia to become electoral members of the SEP and to actively participate in the campaign being waged by the party to defeat these deregistration laws.

Health Workers Action Committee (Sri Lanka)

The Health Workers Action Committee (HWAC) of Sri Lanka condemns the Australian government's new anti-democratic electoral laws formulated in August to deregister parties without seats in parliament with the backing of the opposition Labor Party. It is a blow to those parties that these laws have suddenly trebled the number of names and details of members they must submit to the electoral authorities to have their party name on ballot papers, alongside their candidates. The number has been increased to 1,500.

The HWAC has also noted the most recent attempt by the Australian government to pass a bill forcing voters to produce identification before being permitted to cast a valid vote. First-time young voters, the elderly, the jobless and homeless, itinerant workers and indigenous people are affected.

As health workers in Sri Lanka, we are aware how the capitalist governments are strangling the democratic rights of working class. In this country we experience the government's attempt to use the draconian "essential service" act to punish the striking workers with jail terms.

The actions of capitalist governments—from the industrialised countries to under-developed countries—are occurring amid a worsening political, economic and social crisis.

We are also aware that, just like in Sri Lanka, the Australian government is opening workplaces and schools amid the raging coronavirus pandemic. These anti-democratic laws have been brought forward to suppress the working class and oppressed people.

We express our solidarity with the campaign being conducted by the Socialist Equality Party in Australia against the new non-parliamentary party deregistration laws.



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