

SEP electoral members denounce Australian government's "woeful" response to the pandemic

Our reporters

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) continues to receive support from electoral members for the campaign to defeat anti-democratic electoral laws rushed through the Australian parliament on August 26.

The laws seek to silence smaller political parties, those without members of parliament, by requiring them to submit a list of 1,500 members, treble the previous number, by December 2 or face deregistration. This affects 36 political parties, including the SEP. If deregistered their candidates cannot run under their party name on the ballot paper during elections.

The interviews below are from health industry workers and a University of Melbourne student. They detail their hostility to the Australian government's homicidal reopening agenda and the lack of proper support for workers and teachers.

The SEP is the only political party in Australia fighting for the elimination of COVID-19 and against unsafe school re-openings. On Saturday November 13 at 4 p.m. (AEDT) the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) will hold a public meeting opposing the reopening and calling for the formation of rank-and-file action safety committees to stop the virus spreading in schools. You can register here to attend.

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

Bradley, 48, is a long-standing electoral member and a paramedic. "The government response to the pandemic has been pretty woeful from a paramedic point of view. The health system was struggling a long time before the pandemic came along.

"From my experience, there has been no extra funding thrown our way. We are 18 months into it, we

must wear PPE equipment, but at the same time society is opening up. The reasoning is the hospitals can't afford us to get COVID and be off for 14 days. What I tell everyone is that the virus is our problem, that it's a workers' problem. We are the ones who have to wear PPE.

"China built whole new hospitals in response to the pandemic. We have tacked on party hire tents to existing hospitals."

Commenting on the unions, he said, "I think they're breaking apart. There's a general consensus that the unions don't represent the frontline paramedics anymore. It's not like it was 30 or 40 years ago, with delegates floating about. Many members feel disenfranchised and there are very few active members of the union."

Asked why there had been such a failed response to the virus by the governments, Bradley said, "Welcome to Capitalism 101. It's all based on financial decisions and there's no confidence whatsoever in the government handling of this pandemic. The hesitancy towards vaccines shows there is a lot of distrust.

"You wonder where it will end. In the US, the 'land of great democracy,' the pinnacle of capitalism, it's a complete mess. You look at parts of it and say, that's a third-world country. The only other alternative when you think about it is socialism."

Dylan, 31, is studying at the University of Melbourne for a teaching degree. The new electoral laws, he said, "are designed so that the major parties are unchallenged by small parties that possess a different viewpoint, just when different perspectives are really needed."

Referring to the government's planned Voter ID legislation, he said, "It seems that this is going to affect

minority groups and heavily affect indigenous populations. The laws are similar to what happened in America during the last Trump election where there were instances of legislation reducing minority's ability to vote, preventing people voting who had a conviction or a fine."

Dylan said it was necessary to consider an alternative to capitalism and referred to the escalating cost of housing in Australia. "One of the issues that concerns me is the rising house prices. I don't see how this is going to be solved under the current system. I encourage considering other alternatives to the capitalist model. There needs to be a change and I support the socialist perspective on that change.

"House prices have risen by about 20 percent in Australia in just a year. This is such a short period of time. It doesn't seem possible, and I'm baffled as to how anyone can afford \$1 million houses on wages that haven't gone up. I'm looking at a teacher's wage and I wouldn't be able to support a million-dollar loan," he said.

Dylan spoke about the difficulties confronting university students and staff during the pandemic lockdowns but said that his teachers and lecturers were "going beyond what they are being paid for... a lot of them are only on part-time contracts and just get paid for the lectures that they produce. I think that says a bit about how teachers are undervalued across the board, not just in the university sector."

Dylan, who has also been doing teacher training in high schools, said lots of teachers were concerned about the reopenings.

The government, he said, "has changed what is considered a close contact at a school. Now you must be in a room with a child for two hours. This means that any high school teacher who sees six different classes a day, that's about two hundred students, they would never be considered a close contact of any student that got ill because of the time-period. This is ludicrous.

"Obviously teachers want to go back to the way things were, but some of them are worried about their health and safety," he continued. "I know of one teacher that didn't come back after schools reopened... There were three kids at my school who had contracted COVID and only their class was isolated for a week. I think that the other classes within their grade just had to

get tested."



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