

SEP electoral members oppose Australian governments' dangerous COVID-19 reopening drive

Our reporters
30 November 2021

Socialist Equality Party (SEP) electoral members continue to voice their support for the SEP's campaign to defeat Australia's new anti-democratic electoral laws, which were rushed through parliament with Labor Party support on August 26. The measures target the SEP, along with 35 other political parties that do not have seats in parliament, forcing them to submit a list of 1,500 members, treble the previous number, by December 2 or face deregistration.

Deregistration would mean SEP candidates could not stand with the party's name on a ballot paper in federal elections. The purpose of the laws is to prevent opposition to the major parties finding a left-wing and socialist expression.

Support the SEP's campaign against the legislation and sign up as an electoral member today.

Rania, 45, a teacher's aide in a school for children with autism, became an electoral member last year. "The new electoral laws are ridiculous. It is very belittling, saying that the people aren't strong enough to make their own decisions," she said.

"The government wants to be in control, rather than letting the people have their say on how things should operate and run. Those in power see it as a threat to them and they want to find ways to stop people from opposing them," she added.

The government response to COVID-19 was "chaotic," Rania continued. "We've gone back to school with full force, there was no staggered approach. It was all rushed, irrational and we were thrown in the deep end. Last month, we had year 12s and kindergarten return the first week and then everyone else returned. The situation was not properly

communicated with teachers, educators or even principals," she said.

"With the snap lockdowns, there was never any proper preparation to ensure a smooth transition to online learning and the difficulties associated with it. It is entirely new and many teaching professionals had not been involved in that kind of online system before the pandemic.

"The lockdowns are necessary. The reason they resumed face-to-face learning so quickly is because everyone is going back to work with the reopening, so everyone's kids have to be pushed back into schools. We are basically being treated as child-minders, rather than inspiring or teaching these kids. The government has also been very unclear about who is or isn't an essential worker.

"Apart from a couple of weeks last year in March, our school has been open throughout virtually the entire pandemic. We had to reduce class sizes. Instead of five days, I would go to the school for two days and the other three days would be done online. The school was never properly closed in the latest lockdowns, there was just modified attendance," she added.

Rania said one of her friends had worked at a public school that had a COVID-19 infection and recently learnt about cases at two other schools in the same area.

"We've been lucky that we haven't had a case at our school yet. It's hard enough to get students to social distance but when you have special needs children, there is no such thing as social distancing, and it is difficult to maintain proper hygiene in general," she said.

"Delta was bad enough but even with the latest Omicron variant, the government will probably not do

another lockdown. That's a real worry. The government is saying that we need to live with it.

"This disease is not to be taken lightly. We need to find a way to eradicate it. My auntie got COVID-19 in Lebanon and had to be placed on a ventilator. Fortunately, she made it but has not been the same since. She can't physically do things in the way that she used to. We are only beginning to learn about the long-term effects, but they indicate just how dangerous this is," Rania said.

John, an 83-year-old, previously worked for the government-owned Telecom, later privatised and renamed Telstra, until he was made redundant in the 1990s.

"I used to be a shop steward and was fighting all the time with this particular boss. They started to offer redundancies and packages to the older technicians. I believe they were getting it set up for privatisation," he said.

Commenting on the pandemic, John stated, "I'm flabbergasted with those who don't believe that it's a virus and getting vaccinated infringes on their freedom. I think [Victorian Labor Premier] Daniel Andrews eased the restrictions too early. Even though the vaccination rates are around 90 percent we've still got a thousand people a day catching it. My neighbour caught it and he was double vaxxed. Although they say it's not as severe if you're fully vaccinated, he said it's the worst thing he's ever had. He's in his 60s and fit as a trout."

John met the SEP through Facebook and became an electoral member this year. Asked why he decided to join, he answered, "It's a party of the left. I agree with what I understand socialism to be. I thought I'd help if I could. I used to be a member of the Labor Party, up until they started privatising things."



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