

Growing opposition to Twitter censorship of Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

Oscar Grenfell
23 July 2022

More than two days since it was first imposed, a lock on the Twitter account of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) remains in place, effectively disabling it. The protracted character of the measure, and the absence of any credible explanation from the social media company, brands its actions as political censorship.

Posts demanding the full reinstatement of the SEP account and an explanation from Twitter's page have been shared hundreds of times and have reached thousands of users. Many have drawn a connection between the lock on the SEP account, and a broader campaign to silence those critical of official policies, including militarism, war and the "herd immunity" COVID policies.

As the WSWs reported previously, the lock was first imposed on Thursday, Australian (AEST) time no later than 10:50am.

Only a couple of minutes earlier, the SEP account had published a video.

It defended Dr David Berger, a well-known general practitioner, under sanction from Australia's medical authorities for his consistent opposition to the "let it rip" COVID policies and advocacy of an elimination strategy aimed at ending the pandemic. The video drew attention to the parallel between the attacks on Berger and other fighters for social and democratic rights, including WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange.

The video can be viewed below.

When the lock was imposed, that video was removed by Twitter and replaced with a label claiming that it had violated unspecified rules.

The initial lock was to be for 12 hours, gave no information about the supposed infractions of the page, could not be reviewed and provided no means of communication or redress. After the 12 hours had

elapsed, the SEP received notification that its account remained locked.

The video supposedly had "Violat[ed] our rules against posting or sharing privately produced/distributed intimate media of someone without their express consent." The lock would remain in place until and unless the video was deleted entirely.

On Friday morning, at roughly 9:30am (AEST), the SEP filed an appeal. It noted that the stated grounds for the censorship of the video were bogus. It contained no "intimate" content. All the images were in the public domain or had been provided to the WSWs by those depicted.

Three hours later, at 12:30pm (AEST), the SEP received confirmation that its appeal had been received. More than 24 hours since then, Twitter has not answered the appeal in any way.

The timeline raises concerning questions:

Was the initial unexplained lock of 12 hours merely to provide administrators with time to concoct a pretext for the censorship?

Why was the SEP account disabled entirely, rather than given some sort of warning? It is associated with a well-known and longstanding political organisation, has more than 2,000 followers and has operated on Twitter since 2010 without any accusations of rule infringements.

Have any human evaluators been involved in the censorship of the SEP account? If so, how could they possibly be under the misapprehension that the video contains "intimate" images, when it clearly does not? If they were so mistaken, why didn't they contact the SEP to clarify the issue?

If Twitter's actions to this point are purely the result of algorithms and automated processes, why did it take three hours for receipt of the SEP's appeal to be

acknowledged? This clearly indicates the involvement of human moderators.

If the SEP video was the subject of a false complaint in the few minutes that it was visible, why has this malicious report been taken at face value and acted upon so drastically? Anyone who has been on Twitter for some time knows that such false reports are a common occurrence. Generally they are investigated before any action is taken.

Why has the report, if one were made, seemingly been treated by Twitter as an unchallengeable and semi-official edict?

This raises the obvious question: If there was a false report in relation to the SEP video, did it come from a prominent political figure or any individual associated with government and state agencies?

In regard to the last question, it is notable that Berger's personal Twitter account has repeatedly been subjected to comments from right-wing trolls, defending the government policies of mass infection and death.

There is also an ecosystem of anti-Assange accounts, which feed off and promote the decade-long campaign of the intelligence apparatuses to destroy the courageous journalist. One of the most persistent of those accounts has repeatedly gloated about the SEP Twitter lock.

Twitter's silence is all the more striking, given the substantial support that has been voiced for the full reinstatement of the SEP account.

On Thursday afternoon, SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp posted a Tweet reporting the lock. As of this writing, Crisp's post has been retweeted, or shared, more than 240 times and liked by almost 500. It has received over 35,000 impressions, a measure of how many times the post appeared in Twitter feeds of unique individual users.

Many others have posted strong comments. Chris Turnbull, an independent journalist, retweeted Crisp's post, with the comment: "The attack on Dr Berger continues: now extended to those who defend him: Twitter suspending groups who are not in violation of their own rules."

Another user wrote: "It is unconscionable but unsurprising to find Twitter solidarizing itself with the state in suppressing a major physician-journalist like Dr David Berger from telling the truth about the

pandemic."

A longstanding supporter of Assange wrote: ". @TwitterSupport unlock the @SEP_Australia acct - reinstate it fully! @Twitter users need reliable accts! SEP reports on & defends workers around the world! For yrs they have defended #JulianAssange bringing light to a blacked-out story. 7 articles on #AssangeCase in July alone!"

One user cut to the heart of the issue, posting: "Irony? Someone tweets about the free speech of *others* on *various* topics. Twitter responds by removing their tweet and locking their account?! The tweet was maliciously reported as [containing intimate] content???? @TwitterSupport"

The SEP will continue to demand the complete reinstatement of its account and a full explanation of how and why the censorship was imposed. This is critical to defeating a precedent for further attacks on anti-war, left-wing and socialist posts on the platform.

We urge all other Twitter users committed to democratic rights to aid this campaign. Tweet your opposition to the lock, direct it to @TwitterSupport and include the hashtag #OpposeSEPTwitterLock.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)