

SEP (Australia) files second appeal against Twitter censorship

Oscar Grenfell

25 July 2022

July 26 is the sixth day that the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) Twitter account has been locked, a measure effectively disabling it, without reason or rational explanation.

A video posted by the account last Thursday morning (AEST), has been branded by Twitter as breaking the site's rules against "posting or sharing privately produced/distributed intimate media of someone without their express consent." The video contained no images that could conceivably be described as such.

Despite this, Twitter has not responded to an appeal submitted by the SEP on Friday morning (AEST), demanding the reinstatement of the account and an explanation for the censorship.

Yesterday morning, a second appeal was submitted, which has also been posted publicly on Twitter by SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp. It states:

"Twitter Support has refused to respond to our appeal of 72 hours ago to lift the lock which you imposed on the @SEP_Australia now 4 days ago. Despite proving categorically that we have breached none of the Twitter guidelines, including the ones cited as the basis for your arbitrary and anti-democratic actions, you have remained silent and the lock is still in place.

"The Twitter claims were that a video we posted violated rules 'against posting or sharing privately produced/distributed intimate media of someone without their express consent.' A cursory review would reveal this is patently false.

"It is absolutely clear that this is a politically motivated censorship of a political party with a more than 50-year history in this country and one which has fought consistently against the attack on democratic rights of which this is one.

"We are sending a second appeal to you, @TwitterSupport to reverse its lock on the

@SEP_Australia. We oppose, in the strongest terms, the censorship of the SEP for the video we tweeted on Thursday. The video links SEP's campaign in defence of Dr David Berger, an Australian general practitioner targeted for opposing the official 'let it rip' program of mass COVID infection, to the plight of Julian Assange and others who have had their democratic rights attacked.

"We demand that Twitter reverse its lock on the @SEP_Australia immediately. We will not take down the video as it breaks no rules. Twitter's continued lock is an assault on free speech and underscores the importance of the fight to defend democratic rights."

As of this posting, the second appeal has also not been answered, more than 24 hours after it was lodged.

As Crisp notes, Twitter's actions are an extraordinary attack on democratic rights, with broad implications.

Overnight, an Australian political party, with a record of more than 50 years of activity, has had a significant aspect of its public profile shutdown, without any grounds or meaningful ability to appeal.

This affects not only the SEP, but its audience and potential audience. In the first instance, the SEP page has more than 2,000 followers, accumulated over twelve years of continuous postings on Twitter since 2010.

Large numbers of workers, young people and professionals, who may not yet have encountered the SEP, peruse Twitter, looking for discussion on current events and politics, including escalating militarism and war, the erosion of democratic rights and the consequences of the "let it rip" COVID program adopted by governments around the world, including in Australia.

They are being denied the opportunity to access the socialist and internationalist alternative to these ruling-

class policies, as it has been advanced by the SEP account previously.

The censorship, moreover, which has a clear impact on Australian political life, has been carried out by a global technology company, headquartered in the United States, which is accountable to no one but its ultra-wealthy shareholders and the government-intelligence agencies that it frequently collaborates with.

The only phone number that can be found for Twitter on the open Internet is answered by an automated message, declaring that it does not accept calls! The company is thus faceless, voiceless and uncontrollable, its support representatives free to ignore complaints and appeals from behind their computer screens.

A test carried out by SEP members has underscored the Kafkaesque character of Twitter's moderation policies. From their personal accounts, three SEP members posted the video that had been censored on the SEP page, with an identical comment above.

The first had not posted links from the *World Socialist Web Site* or closely associated their account with the SEP. Their post of the very same video that has resulted in the disabling of the SEP account remains visible on Twitter, a day after it was put there.

Two other SEP members, who do post links to the WSWs and identify their accounts with the SEP also shared the video. Their postings were removed within seconds and their accounts were immediately locked.

This strongly suggests the involvement of an algorithm that is incorrectly labeling the video as an infraction of Twitter rules. The fact that one of the three tweets remained, however, raises questions as to whether this particular algorithm is being selectively applied to close supporters of the WSWs and the SEP.

As with the SEP account, the two members were subjected to a 12-hour lock. After that had elapsed, they were given the option of deleting the video, or their account would remain locked. One of them did delete the video, prompting a message from Twitter: "By agreeing to delete the tweet, you acknowledge that it violated Twitter's rules of conduct."

The video, however, violates no rules. Clearly, it is not an option for the SEP, a political party, to "acknowledge" that it shared "intimate media of someone without their express consent," when it did not. Twitter's bizarre allegation suggests conduct that

in some jurisdictions, including Australia, could be in breach of criminal laws.

The protracted nature of the Twitter lock demonstrates that it is politically-motivated censorship. Whatever the role of the social media company's opaque algorithms, themselves set into motion by administrators, Twitter support has had days to correct any error that was made in falsely labeling the video as a violation of the rules.

The political character of this censorship is clear.

The video defended Dr Berger, who is the target of a malicious witch-hunt by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, because he opposes the profit-driven "let it rip" policies that are currently resulting in a massive surge of the virus.

The video also supported Julian Assange, the subject of an unprecedented 12-year witch-hunt by the US, British, Australian and Swedish governments, over his exposure of war crimes. The American intelligence agencies, which are known to direct instructions to Twitter and other social media companies, have orchestrated the persecution of the WikiLeaks publisher.

In other words, these are "hot button" issues that are followed with the greatest interest in the corridors of power, and around which massive attacks on civil liberties have already been imposed.

The SEP will continue its campaign for the full reinstatement of its account, to defend its own rights and to defeat a precedent for further censorship of left-wing, anti-war and socialist content. We appeal to all workers, students and young people to assist us by posting statements demanding an end to the lock to @TwitterSupport.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact