

Twitter ends censorship of Socialist Equality Party (Australia) after widespread opposition

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Late last night, Twitter lifted a lock on the account of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) which had effectively disabled it beginning on July 21. The account has been fully reinstated, with all functionalities previously denied to it, including posting, retweeting, responding to messages and commenting on other user's posts, restored.

In an email, Twitter stated: "Our support team has reviewed your account and it appears we made an error. We've determined there was no violation and have restored your account to full functionality. We sincerely apologize for any inconvenience and appreciate you taking the time to submit your appeal request to us."

The social media corporation contradicted itself, with the automated message informing the SEP of the reinstatement on Twitter itself declaring: "Thank you for addressing the issue. Your account is now available for use. To prevent future lockouts or account suspension, please review the Twitter Rules and help us maintain a safe environment for everyone on Twitter."

As clear as mud!

Twitter's reversal is nevertheless a welcome development, undermining a precedent for broader attacks on left-wing, anti-war and socialist material on the internet.

The lock had shut down an important component of the public presence of the SEP, a political party with a history spanning 50 years. It limited the ability of the SEP to intervene in the growing discussions on Twitter about war, the "let it rip" COVID policies and a broader assault on democratic rights.

The targeting of an organisation opposing these ruling class policies and advancing a socialist, revolutionary and internationalist alternative for the working class, was unmistakable political censorship.

That conclusion is supported by the fact that Twitter

has provided no explanation whatsoever for its actions. In effect, that means that the SEP's analysis of the politically motivated character of the lock stands, because it has not been contradicted by the social media company and no other plausible explanation has been advanced.

The timing and character of the measure demonstrates that it was not the result of a single "error," or a glitch in one of the social media corporation's many opaque and mysterious algorithms, themselves designed and set into motion by Twitter's administrators.

The lock was imposed on the morning of July 21, Australian time. The measure was initially to be limited to 12 hours and no reason or avenue of appeal was provided.

A video posted by the SEP account minutes before the lock was removed and replaced with a message claiming that it had violated unspecified rules.

When the initial 12 hours elapsed, the lock was extended. A message was sent by Twitter, demanding the deletion of the video, and claiming that it had violated prohibitions against "posting or sharing privately produced/distributed intimate media of someone without their express consent."

This assertion was as bizarre as it was false. There was nothing in the 59-second video that could remotely be described as fitting the description provided by Twitter.

This point was made in an SEP appeal against the lock on the morning of July 22. Twitter acknowledged receipt of the SEP appeal some three hours after it was lodged. Then there was radio silence. A further appeal was submitted on the morning of Monday, July 25, which received no acknowledgement until the lifting of the ban last night.

Whatever the role of algorithms, the timeline shows that Twitter administrators stonewalled and sat upon the appeal, while making serious accusations against a longstanding and well-known political party. Even a cursory viewing of the video, which would have taken less than a minute, would have shown that it did not violate any rules.

Raising other concerning questions is the fact that on Monday morning, another Twitter user posted the very same video, with an identical caption to that which had been used by the SEP. The post was not removed or interfered with in any way, indicating that the contents of the video alone did not trigger any automated algorithmic error.

As many opponents of the lock noted, it was ironic and striking that the video targeted by Twitter for censorship had focussed on significant attacks on freedom of speech.

The video was part of the SEP's campaign in defence of Dr David Berger. He has been threatened with deregistration by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and instructed to undertake a special "education" course if he wishes to remain a doctor.

Berger's "crime" is to have vocally opposed the "let it rip" COVID policies adopted by governments around the world and in Australia, and to advocate for the scientifically grounded measures required to eliminate transmission and end the pandemic.

The attack on Berger comes as all Australian governments, led by the federal Labor administration, dispense with the last nominal safety measures. They are implementing this under conditions of the worst surge of the virus yet, which is now frequently claiming more than a hundred lives a day, more than twice the level of a month ago.

The video connected the attacks on Berger to the persecution of other Zero-COVID activists. They included Lisa Diaz, a British parent who was threatened with prosecution for withdrawing her children from a COVID infested school, and who had organised a powerful parents strike. Another was David O'Sullivan, a London bus driver sacked for campaigning against the "herd immunity" policies that had killed dozens of his colleagues.

Finally, the video raised the case of Julian Assange, the WikiLeaks publisher who has been hounded and

persecuted for 12 years because he exposed US-led war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Assange has been targeted by the major imperialist powers and their intelligence agencies, with greater intensity and persistence, than anyone in recent decades.

It is clear then that the video was not just highly political. It was raising, in an attractive visual medium, issues that cut across and opposed some of the key policies of capitalist governments and their state apparatuses, including in Australia and in the US, where Twitter is headquartered.

It is a matter of public record that the intelligence agencies spend a substantial amount of time monitoring and intervening on social media. One of their aims is to try and prevent left-wing and oppositional content, often in the form of video and visual media, from going "viral" amid widespread and growing social anger and a reemergence of working-class struggle.

Twitter ended its lock on the SEP page, only after a protracted campaign by the party and its supporters, which won widespread support. Tweets demanding an end to the lock were liked thousands of times and shared in the many hundreds.

The SEP account itself received 133 new followers, while it was locked and unable to post any content.

That campaign, and the response to it, points the way forward in the fight for democratic rights and against online censorship. Basic civil liberties, under attack everywhere, can be defended only through the mobilisation of the working class, the only social force committed to democracy, together with young people and principled layers of the middle class.



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