

Democracy can't work without citizen engagement

The *Australian Alert Service* is the weekly publication of the Australian Citizens Party.

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Lead Editorial

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The Citizens Party's current membership drive, to meet the new registration requirements cooked up by the Liberals and Labor to suppress other parties, is closing in on the goal. The party needs to remain registered for the purpose of contesting elections, but our main role in Australian politics is to lead everyday citizens to constantly engage in the political process to fight for economic solutions for the common good, not sectional interests. That role is more important than ever, and in recent years it has been increasingly successful.

The latest example is the fight for a Senate inquiry into the collapse of the Sterling First rent-for-life scheme, and the Australian Securities and Investments Commission's blatant failure to protect the 140 or so elderly pensioners and retirees who are victims of that collapse. Last Thursday, 7 October, ABC 7.30 aired a report on the Sterling victims' fight for an inquiry, which reported the breakthrough that the Labor Party is now supporting an inquiry that includes ASIC (p.3). Since the Citizens Party finalised its campaign to expose the real story behind the removal of Christine Holgate as CEO of Australia Post, having achieved a Senate inquiry that exposed and stopped the privatisation agenda that Holgate got in the way of, we have actively supported the Sterling First victims' campaign, as a case that can expose the corruption that goes to the very top of the financial system. In a Zoom conference on Saturday following 7.30's report, Sterling victims, who have hung on for two years in the fight for justice, were exuberant that they are finally seeing real progress in their campaign since the Citizens Party got involved.

What the Citizens Party brings to its campaigns is not magic; it's citizen engagement, without which democracy cannot work. And in Australia, like many other countries, democracy is broken. In the era of neoliberal sabotage of our economy that we have suffered for the last four decades, the public institutions that previous generations fought to establish, to ensure the needs of citizens were protected in the economy, have been weakened and dismantled. These include institutions like the Commonwealth Bank, which was sold off, and the regulatory agencies, which have been captured by the banks. As many citizens lost their productive jobs in the free trade annihilation of manufacturing and other productive sectors of the economy, Australian citizens generally also lost their power over their economic fate, which had been vested in those institutions. On their own, citizens are powerless, but through the agency of government, the people have the greatest power to shape their future. But it is essential to ensure that government works for the people, which the neoliberal ideology has stopped. By re-engaging the public in deeper political processes than just elections, such as in lobbying politicians and making submissions to inquiries, we can start to turn that around, and we are.

Contrast that approach to the current scandal in Victoria, where the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) is holding hearings on branch-stacking in the Labor Party (the Liberal Party is embroiled in its own branch-stacking scandals in Victoria and New South Wales). Labor MP Anthony Byrne—incidentally one of the extreme anti-China "Wolverines" in federal Parliament, who preaches that the superiority of our "democracy" justifies going to war against China—has confessed in the IBAC hearings to having participated in branch-stacking for decades. Branchstacking involves signing up large numbers of people as party members, often people from ethnic communities who don't even know they are members, to rig the "numbers" to create a power base to support factional agendas. This is rife at the grassroots of both major parties, and it shows that what's called "democracy" in Australia is largely fake.

If democracy in Australia is to work—government of, by, and for the people—citizens must take it back. This is the Citizens Party’s mission—join us!

In this issue:

- Add your voice to calls for a Sterling-ASIC inquiry
- NZ’s interest rate pin precariously close to Australia’s property bubble
- ASIC overhaul requires paradigm shift
- Bernard Collaery escapes secret trial
- When it comes to China, media ‘experts’ need a lot of help
- Unpicking *The Australian*’s unhinged McCarthyism
- Trade posturing: Britain using Australia to get to Asia
- Insider-trading resignations may be least of the Fed’s vices
- Senate feels the heat from hundreds of bank victims
- London’s Invisible Empire
- ALMANAC: What are the costs and consequences of Australia’s involvement in US-led wars and the US alliance? Part 1

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