

An open letter to workers in Australia: Join the global fight to end the pandemic and save lives in 2022!

Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

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As the New Year begins, workers in Australia and throughout the world must reject government lies that nothing can be done to stop the coronavirus crisis and that its devastating toll is inevitable.

The working class, basing itself on science and the needs of society, has to act collectively and finally put an end to the COVID-19 pandemic. 2022 must not be another nightmarish year of mass infections, illness and death!

The social catastrophe of the last two years is the outcome of the criminal subordination of public health to the relentless accumulation of corporate profits and the private wealth of mega-millionaires and billionaires.

With their rejection of the necessary public health measures required to end the pandemic, capitalist governments have presided over the deaths of more than five million people around the world. But the true toll, based on excess fatalities, is estimated at more than 18 million, a figure that approaches all of the combat and civilian fatalities during the four years of World War I.

Now, the pandemic has entered its deadliest and most dangerous phase, with an unprecedented global surge of the Omicron variant. The emergence of Omicron was not inevitable. By allowing the unchecked spread of the virus, the ruling elites created the conditions for new, more virulent and potentially vaccine-resistant variants, as epidemiologists and medical experts warned.

Global daily infection rates are now 25 percent higher than any previous peak. But with the undermining of testing regimes, it is likely that tens of millions of people are contracting the potentially deadly virus every single day. The claim that Omicron is a “mild” virus, endlessly repeated by capitalist politicians and their corrupt lackeys in the corporate media, is being refuted, not only in epidemiological studies, but in the massive growth of hospital admissions in one country after another.

With the Omicron surge, the mask has well and truly come off. The ruling elite globally has dispensed with any pretence of ending the pandemic or even mitigating its worst consequences. Their program is to declare the virus “endemic” and “benign” as it causes hundreds of millions of infections into the indefinite future and millions more deaths.

Nowhere is the shift in the global situation more evident than in Australia. Governments here have always rejected a scientifically-based strategy to eliminate the virus. But in earlier stages of the pandemic, they were repeatedly compelled by the demands of

workers, young people and epidemiologists to implement safety measures, including lockdowns. As belated and limited as these were, they succeeded in suppressing transmission of the virus in every state and territory.

Now, however, the entire political establishment openly proclaims that the murderous program of “herd immunity.” Labor and Liberal-National governments alike joined together in the “national cabinet” in last months of 2021 to lift all safety measures, in a profit-driven transition to “living with the virus,” even as the Delta variant circulated.

When it emerged in late November, government spokesmen actually welcomed Omicron into the country, declaring, without a shred of evidence that its spread could be beneficial, because it “may be” less lethal than Delta, the deadliest variant so far.

New South Wales Coalition Health Minister Brad Hazzard summed up the agenda in December, stating, “Bottom line here is that we would expect that pretty well everybody... at some point will get Omicron.” Underscoring the complete bipartisanship, the Queensland Labor government’s chief health officer declared this month, “All of us are going to be exposed.”

This is not passive speculation, but an active program of mass infection. As Omicron began circulating, government leaders urged mass attendance at the reopened nightclubs, bars, mass sporting matches and other super-spreading events. Together with the corrupt, corporatised trade unions, they have herded the vast majority of workers back to their places of employment, whatever the risk of infection.

Already, this program has produced a calamity. The first seven days of 2022 have witnessed more confirmed infections in Australia than the previous two years of the pandemic. Per capita daily infections are higher than in the United States, long the global epicentre of the pandemic, where Omicron is also surging.

In less than a month, the country has recorded almost 550,000 confirmed infections, compared with little over 30,000 in the first sixteen months of the pandemic. In New South Wales, the largest state, daily infections have soared from 234 on December 7, to 45,098 today. In Victoria, there were 1,180 new cases reported on December 7, today there were 51,356. In other states, where there was virtually no transmission less than a month ago, cases are in the hundreds and thousands and doubling rapidly. The real figures are far higher because the testing regime has broken down

everywhere.

Like their counterparts internationally, the governments declare that the infections are of no importance, and hospitalisations are what matters. Not only are hospitalisations climbing and higher than at any previous time, but skyrocketing daily infections will inevitably lead to a huge rise in cases of Long COVID. This afflicts up to one in three people who are infected, and includes potentially severe damage to all of the body's organ systems.

Already, the medical systems are in collapse, operating in ways that have likely not been seen in an Australian hospital since the Spanish flu pandemic one hundred years ago. Infected nurses are being compelled to remain on the job in NSW, as more than 5,000 of their colleagues are furloughed. The most basic infection control measures are being dispensed with, including the separation of COVID and non-COVID wards.

By all modelling, the hospital systems in every state and territory will approach or exceed total capacity by the end of the month or early next month, raising the prospect of critically-ill people being denied care. The death toll has already begun to rise, and the dangers were highlighted this week, with the tragic passing of a healthy, double-vaccinated 23-year-old man in Sydney.

But governments insist that nothing can be done, except to allow the mass infection and illness to proceed. They claim that this is inevitable and there is no alternative. But this is a lie. Epidemiologists have explained the measures that need to be taken to end transmission, and their efficacy has been demonstrated in practice by China, and previously in New Zealand and Australia itself.

The trade unions peddle the same lies. Throughout the pandemic, they have played the critical role in suppressing workers' opposition to the subordination of health to profits. The unions have forced workers to remain in unsafe workplaces, or to return to them, facilitating the reopening drive. At the same time, they have deepened their collaboration with governments and corporations in sweeping, pro-business restructuring, including major attacks on jobs, wages and conditions.

Teachers in Chicago, who defied government-union demands that they return to deathtrap classrooms this week and have called for a transition to online learning, show the way forward for workers around the world in forcing necessary public health measures to be implemented.

In Australia, mass anger and opposition is growing, among health staff and broader sections of the working-class, including warehouse and factory workers who are being infected at unprecedented rates. There is widespread hostility among teachers, parents and students to the planned resumption of mass face-to-face teaching with the start of the school year at the end of the month.

These sentiments must be transformed into a political movement of the working class, directed against the entire capitalist political establishment, including Labor and the unions, which have unfurled as their banner the mass illness and death of working people. Urgent action must be prepared, including strikes and shutdowns to close non-essential workplaces and to prevent children and teachers being forced into schools that will function as incubators of mass illness and death.

This must be the starting point of a fight for the global elimination of the coronavirus, waged by workers in Australia hand-in-hand with their class brothers and sisters around the world.

The following principles must serve as the foundation of such a movement:

1. The present policy of "herd immunity"—i.e., allowing COVID-19 to spread throughout the population—must be repudiated. A new strategy directed toward the elimination and eradication of SARS-CoV-2 must be adopted.

2. The policies implemented to stop viral transmission must be determined by the needs of public health. The protection of human life and safety must take absolute and unconditional priority over all corporate-financial interests. The costs of fighting the pandemic—including the payment of wages and salaries, compensation to small business owners, full medical coverage for the ill, and payments to bereaved families—must be borne by corporations and a 100 percent tax on the windfall pandemic profits obtained by large investors through the run-up in the stock market.

3. The fight against the pandemic must be conducted on a global scale. The pandemic cannot be stopped unless SARS-CoV-2 is eliminated in all countries. Australian workers must demand that vaccines be provided in necessary quantities, free of charge, to their class brothers and sisters in the less developed countries.

Labor, the Liberal-Nationals, big business and the corporate-controlled media, together with the trade unions, will declare that these policies are 1) impossible to implement and 2) incompatible with the existing capitalist system.

The answer to the first objection is that it is impossible to accept the infection of millions of people and the massive loss of life. As for the second objection, the answer is simply this: If capitalism can offer no solution to a crisis that threatens the lives and well-being of the vast majority of the population, then it should be gotten rid of and replaced with a socialist system that prioritises life over profits.

The fight against COVID is, in essence, a struggle against capitalism. The tragedy of the past two years has made the case for the reorganisation of the world economy in the interests of the working class. We urge all workers to circulate this statement, initiate discussion at your workplace, form rank-and-file committees and win support for collective action to stop the spread of the pandemic.

Contact the Socialist Equality Party and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. We are eager to discuss with you the situation in your workplace and to assist you in organising the fight to end the pandemic.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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