Attend SEP (Australia) online forum: The COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis of capitalism and the way forward for health workers

15 September 2020

The Socialist Equality Party (Australia) invites health workers to take part in an online forum on Saturday, September 19 at 5 p.m. (AEST), to discuss the coronavirus pandemic, its impact on health workers and the need to form rank-and-file safety committees to protect and defend staff in this sector.

The pandemic, which has to date claimed over 900,000 lives globally, and infected nearly 30 million people, continues to spread rampantly around the world. This was both foreseeable and foreseen. The devastating loss of lives and livelihoods is not simply the result of the virus, but is the consequence of conscious decisions by capitalist governments, placing the interests of private profit above, and at the expense of, social need.

From the outset, the pandemic has been treated as an economic crisis, rather than a health crisis. While Australian federal and state governments, with bipartisan support from Labor and the trade unions, have provided hundreds of billions of dollars to the banks and major corporations, a miserable $2.4 billion was pledged to health spending to combat one of the most infectious and virulent viruses ever experienced.

The ruling elites around the world have abandoned any pretence of stopping the pandemic through social distancing and the shutdown of non-essential production. In Australia, the rush to prematurely "reopen the economy" in May and force workers back to work, led to a resurgence of COVID-19 infections, particularly in Victoria.

The recent remarks by former Prime Minister Tony Abbott, branding any measures to tackle the spread of COVID-19 as a "health dictatorship," and declaring that the elderly should be left to die from the virus, reflects the attitude of the ruling elite towards the working class and those most vulnerable to the coronavirus.

Health workers are being infected at a rate five to six times higher than the rest of the community. This is the result of inadequate personal protective equipment (PPE), infection control measures and staffing levels. At least 3,416 Victorian health workers have tested positive for COVID-19, and despite initial denials from the state Labor government, it was revealed that some 70-80 percent of COVID-19 infections in health workers in Victoria were acquired at work.

The virus has been allowed to tear through aged care facilities, with close to 2,000 total infections among residents and hundreds of cases among staff. More than half of COVID-19 deaths in Australia have occurred in residential aged care.

Over decades, both Labor and Liberal-National governments, aided by the trade unions, have overseen cuts to public health services, leaving the health system unequipped to deal with a pandemic. The trade unions have largely remained silent about the conditions facing health workers and have blocked any independent struggle by workers for measures to stop the spread of the virus and save lives. This is not only the case with the health unions but throughout all workplaces and industries.

The safety and well being of health workers must be taken out of the hands of governments and unions who have no interest in this task. The Socialist Equality Party is fighting for the establishment of rank-and-file safety committees, controlled by workers themselves, to enforce health and safety conditions in workplaces and hospitals.

We urge health workers to participate in this important discussion.

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Please click the link below to join the forum on Saturday, September 19 at 5 p.m. (AEST):

https://zoom.us/j/96607041667?pwd=SDcrRElMaEJqZWlQbmw0Y2tQN3g4dz09

Or Telephone: Dial (for higher quality, dial a number based on your current location):

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Webinar ID: 966 0704 1667

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