# Australian Labor governments push homicidal “live with the virus” program

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Amid the country’s worst COVID outbreak, Australia’s state Labor governments are demonstrating their full commitment to the bipartisan program of forcing the population to “live with” the deadly virus, so that full corporate profit-making activities can be resumed.

In Victoria, the Labor administration of Daniel Andrews is lifting a limited lockdown tomorrow, even though the state is experiencing the greatest surge of the Delta variant in any Australian jurisdiction since the pandemic began. In Queensland, Labor Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk this week announced a “roadmap” explicitly premised on allowing COVID to circulate in the north-eastern state.

The leading role of the Labor governments is in line with their adoption, along with all the other state, territory and federal administrations, of a “national plan” to lift lockdowns and end other safety measures, based on arbitrary vaccination targets that have failed to halt surges in other countries, such as Singapore and Israel. This program was decided upon in the national cabinet, behind closed doors and without any public input, in July, and ratified again in August.

Despite voting for and endorsing the national “reopening,” some Labor governments, especially in Queensland and Western Australia, have played a cynical double game. They have condemned other Liberal-National governments, especially in New South Wales (NSW), for failing to curb the spread of COVID, and have warned that federal demands for the “normalisation” of COVID will lead to mass illness and death in their state.

On September 2, for instance Palaszczuk tweeted: “If NSW is the model of what lies in store for all of us, then serious discussions are needed.” She referenced official modelling, by the Doherty Institute, which asserted that in a worse-case scenario, “even with 70 percent of the population vaccinated, 80 people will die each day six months after the outbreak. That’s 2,240 who will die each month.”

The Queensland premier and her chief health officer also repeatedly raised mass child infections in Britain and the US, contradicting lying attempts by large sections of the corporate media and other governments to downplay the dangers of COVID illness, transmission and death among children.

The Labor government’s posturing always had an opportunistic and dishonest character to it. There have been a number of small outbreaks in Queensland, because the government, like every other has refused to develop safe quarantine facilities. Palaszczuzuk’s government, moreover, has allowed mass sporting events to proceed throughout much of this year, including with large cohorts of athletes, their families, coaching teams and reporters from states where the virus has been present.

Palaszczuzuk’s attempts to differentiate from the federal and NSW governments reflected the widespread popular support for lockdown measures. Her government, as well as the WA administration, won landslide elections last year on the basis of their claims to have protected the population from COVID, bucking a trend of most ballots punishing the incumbents.

Now, however, amid a stepped-up campaign by the corporate and financial elite, globally and within Australia, for an end to lockdowns once and for all, the Queensland government has dispensed with its earlier warnings.

On Monday, Palaszczuzuk announced that from November 17, based on 70 percent of adult Queenslanders having been vaccinated, the state border will be opened. Fully vaccinated people from “hotspot” areas will be required to present a negative test and to quarantine for a fortnight. On December 17, the isolation requirement will be lifted.

The measures were presented as a “cautious” plan to “reunite families for Christmas,” indicating government fears of a backlash if safety measures are seen as being lifted too rapidly.

Officials, however, made no secret of the implications of the announcement, with Chief Health Officer Jeannette Young declaring, “Once we start seeing cases, this virus will find people who aren’t vaccinated, and we now have a deadline.” Young predicted daily infections of 400 a day next year, a figure she said could potentially spike to 1,200.

Significantly, it is a Labor government that is the first in the country to adopt a “roadmap” that will reintroduce the virus into a state that has effectively eliminated COVID transmission. While the state has recorded a handful of cases over recent weeks, an outbreak of Delta in July–August was effectively suppressed through lockdown measures.

The Queensland authorities have claimed their healthcare system will be able to cope with a rise in infections, but

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medical experts differ. In a statement early this month, the Australian Medical Association of Queensland (AMAQ) warned that the state's hospitals were already operating at 100 percent capacity, without COVID patients, while ambulances were frequently forced to "ramp" outside facilities, waiting for a bed to become available.

Dr Kim Hansen, the chair of the AMAQ group examining ramping, told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation: "There's a shortage of doctors and nurses around the state and especially those with critical care training and ICU and emergency training." She warned of a "looming crisis" once the state borders were opened, which could "overwhelm" hospitals.

The same recklessness is being demonstrated by the Labor government in Victoria, only on a greater scale. It is lifting its lockdown at midnight tonight, under conditions in which infections have been approaching or exceeding 2,000 every day for over a week. Today's tally of 2,232 new infections is the second highest of any jurisdiction in Australia, only falling short of the 2,297 registered in Victoria on October 14.

From tomorrow, there will no longer be any restrictions on Victorian citizens leaving their homes. Ten fully vaccinated adults and their dependents can gather inside a house, while 15 can group together outdoors. Pubs, clubs and entertainment venues can open to 20 fully vaccinated people indoors and 50 fully vaccinated people outdoors. Funerals and weddings allow for 20 fully vaccinated people indoors and 50 fully vaccinated outdoors.

A resumption of mass in-person teaching is to be completed by November 5, with year 12 students already having been in the classrooms for a fortnight. Dozens of schools are being hit with COVID outbreaks every week, even before the full return.

The Labor government, moreover, is orchestrating super-spreader events. It is funding a 4,000-person concert in Melbourne next week and is allowing the multi-million-dollar Melbourne Cup horse race to proceed at the beginning of November, with 10,000 spectators. Caps on gatherings and patronage in high-risk venues will be further eased next month, based on 80 percent adult vaccination.

Already, the government has "normalised" COVID infection by winding back contact-tracing. Positive cases are frequently not spoken to by anyone from the health department, meaning no information is gathered on where the virus is circulating. Secondary close contacts of infected people are not required to isolate, and most exposure sites, visited by someone with the coronavirus, are not recorded or publicly listed. Border restrictions have also been substantially wound-back.

With almost 23,000 active cases when the lockdown is lifted, infections in the state are set to skyrocket. And this, under conditions where the hospital system is already overwhelmed.

The vast majority of elective surgeries have been indefinitely postponed. But doctors have told the media that some of the procedures being delayed are not really "elective." They include "stage one" elective operations, which are supposed to be carried out within thirty days because of a risk of serious illness or death, including procedures such as the removal of cancerous skin lesions and bypasses required to prevent heart attack.

There are currently 779 COVID patients in Victorian hospitals, 141 of those in intensive care units (ICUs), 98 of those requiring ventilation. This means that before the reopening, roughly a third of the state's ICU capacity is already occupied by COVID patients. Last year, Andrews pledged to create 4,000 additional ICU beds. But the pledge, announced with great fanfare, was secretly shelved, meaning hospitals may be compelled to create makeshift ICU wards, and to use staff who are not qualified for emergency medicine.

Meanwhile, the federal Liberal-National government continues to crack the whip, with senior ministers demanding that the reopening proceed even more rapidly than currently planned. Treasurer Josh Frydenberg, for instance, has devoted much of the past two weeks to publicly-campaigning for an accelerated lifting of restrictions in Victoria.

Labor's central role in this homicidal program, refutes the claims peddled by the unions and the pseudo-left that it represents an alternative to the Liberal-Nationals, on the question of the pandemic or any other. Labor is an unalloyed party of the banks and big business. With the unions, its central contribution to the ruling elite is to try and suppress working-class resistance to the dictates of finance capital.

The real alternative is the development of an independent movement of the working-class, fighting for the elimination of COVID. This requires the formation of workplace rank-and-file committees, completely independent of the unions, and a socialist perspective that rejects the subordination of health and life to private profit.

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