Socialist Equality Party (Australia) holds health workers' forum on the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 pandemic

Our correspondents
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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Australia held a successful online health workers' forum on December 12 to discuss and develop support for the Global Workers' Inquest into the COVID-19 pandemic initiated by the *World Socialist Web Site*. Participants, including nurses, doctors, hospital staff and aged care and disability workers, attended from across Australia and internationally.

The meeting was held amid the rapid spread of the new, more infectious Omicron variant which has been met with a barrage of lies and misinformation by governments and some health officials in Australia and elsewhere about it being a "milder" mutation.

A full video of the forum can be viewed below.

SEP Assistant National Secretary Max Boddy, who chaired the meeting, outlined the necessity for the Workers' Inquest to cut through the cover-ups and falsifications being used to justify the removal of even the most basic measures to halt the spread of the pandemic.

Boddy raised the comparison made by the WSWS of the pandemic to the First World War, which was only brought to an end through the intervention of the working class, most consciously expressed in the Russian Revolution of 1917. He said the experiences of the past two years have demonstrated that a strategy to end the pandemic can be realised only through a mass social and political movement of the international working class.

Gary Alvernia, a junior doctor, SEP national committee member and WSWS correspondent, gave the opening report to the forum. He explained that the call for the Global Workers' Inquest has been vindicated and made more urgent by the emergence of the Omicron variant.

Alvernia said Omicron is the most transmissible, infective and possibly deadliest version of COVID to date, and young children formed a greater proportion of hospitalisations than with previous variants.

Despite this, governments and some health authorities have downplayed the severity and danger of Omicron, refusing to re-instate lockdowns and claiming without proof that the variant may be less deadly than Delta.

The final speaker was Richard Tyler, a writer for the WSWS and a coordinator of the NHS FightBack initiative established by the SEP in Britain.

Tyler described the work of NHS FightBack, which was formed under conditions where the UK government was seeking to destroy the National Health Service, starving it of vital funds and privatising its most profitable parts. He emphasised that the NHS was in crisis even prior to the pandemic, but this has been intensified by the Johnson government's refusal to take any measures to combat the spread of COVID-19. Health workers face virtually impossible conditions as a result.

These reports prompted a number of questions, including about the pandemic, the effects of the privatisation of health services on the working class, how to get involved in the Workers' Inquest and the role of rank-and-file committees in making workers aware of vital public health information, which is being concealed by governments and the trade unions.

Associate Professor John Brannan, a respiratory

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scientist, was invited to address the meeting on the question of face masks, after an excerpt was played from the testimony to the Global Workers' Inquest by Nicolas Smit, an engineer and scientist, raising awareness about masks and elastomeric respirators.

SEP National Secretary Cheryl Crisp also addressed the meeting. She highlighted the ongoing persecution of journalist and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who has been imprisoned in the UK and faces being extradited to the United States for exposing government war crimes. Crisp explained that access by the working class to verifiable knowledge and the truth, including on the pandemic, is a revolutionary question.

The speakers urged those in attendance to share their experiences, participate in the Global Workers' Inquest and, above all, to draw the necessary political conclusions and join the Socialist Equality Party to fight for the necessary socialist program, based on public health and society's needs, not corporate profit.

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