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# Oppose the dangerous reopening of universities! Students and youth must take up a fight against the pandemic!

**International Youth and Students for Social Equality (Australia)**  
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*This statement will be distributed by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) club members to students and young people around Australia as universities resume for the 2022 academic year.*

The start of 2022 has brought young people around Australia face to face with the cruel reality of the ruling elite's criminal policies amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia was once hailed around the world as a "success story" for keeping case numbers and deaths low relative to countries like the US, Brazil, and those in western Europe. The country is now experiencing 100,000 daily infections spurred on by the highly transmissible Omicron variant. Fatality records are being broken multiple times a week, with 398 deaths in the last seven days alone.

The vertical spike in Australian COVID infections is a result of the murderous "live with the virus" program promoted by governments and the corporate media around the world. Australian federal and state governments—Liberal-National Coalition and Labor alike—have proceeded amid the surge in cases with the pro-business reopening of business, schools, and universities in the interests of the profits of the financial oligarchy, no matter the impact on the lives of ordinary people.

Young people and students must take up a fight against this homicidal profit-driven drive!

Youth are being placed on the frontlines of the governments' ghouliah experiment on the population. As part of the campaign to reopen, universities and schools plan to return to in-person teaching. Cramming students around the country into crowded classrooms and lecture theatres will cause an uncontrolled spread of the deadly virus, resulting in further mass death and suffering.

The death earlier this month of fit, young, healthy, double-vaccinated James Kondilios in Sydney underscores that young people are not safe from the virus. It cuts across this government-media lie—used to justify the profit-driven campaign to "live with the virus"—that youth are invulnerable to the effects of COVID-19. Child hospitalisations amid the Omicron surge are at record levels in almost every country. Unmentioned in the mainstream media as well are the effects of Long COVID, which are not yet fully

understood. What is known, however, is that suffering can persist for many months after initial infection.

Despite the staggering case numbers, and record hospitalisations and deaths due to COVID-19, university campuses around the country are marching in lockstep with the calls by big business to resume face-to-face teaching.

Monash University in Melbourne announced that it will reopen its campus on January 27, while the University of Melbourne will have a "blended" online and on-campus model for onshore students. Sydney's University of New South Wales is also planning a return to campus for the first term of 2022.

University workers at Melbourne's Victoria University—which has a large working-class and immigrant student population—were advised before Christmas that summer courses would resume in person despite COVID-19 case numbers spiraling out of control.

This reopening has gone ahead with the full support of the pro-business trade unions. National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) Assistant National Secretary Gabe Gooding penned an article in the union's magazine, *Advocate*, on November 8, 2021, entitled "Reflections on leaving lockdown and the road ahead." While the current surge due to the spread of Omicron had not yet begun, daily case numbers nationally at the time were over 1,000. In the article, Gooding wrote: "This period as we transition out of lockdowns is the point where we must seize the moment and ensure that we don't 'transition back', but instead 'transition forward.'"

The NTEU has not written a word since on the exponential rise of cases around the country, let alone opposed the drive to reopen universities. The National Union of Students has similarly remained silent on the reopening of university campuses amid mass infections.

Australian children are being herded into unsafe classrooms. No longer is there any pretence that it is safe for children or their teachers or in the interests of their education. It is to force their parents back to work to produce profits for the financial elite. This is occurring under conditions in which many under 12-years-old remain unvaccinated. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison insisted emphatically last week: "Our objective is go back, stay

back, day one term one.”

Young workers employed in hospitality, retail, warehousing, delivery services, and other industries are on the frontline of the dangerous spread of the virus. They often have to work multiple jobs and living in cramped accommodation in order to pay for rent, food, bills, education, and other living expenses. In these sectors, youth are being pressured by bosses and their financial situation to return to work despite the dangers amid mass transmission.

In recent interviews published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, young workers exposed their unsafe work conditions and the indifference of government and business policies to the dangers that workers confront amid the “live with the virus” campaign.

But a shift is underway. Young people, students, and workers are not going to sit back and allow this mass death and misery to continue. Internationally, there is a growing movement of the working class against the homicidal big business policy of “herd immunity” and mass infection.

Teachers around the world are speaking out in opposition to the murderous plans to return to face-to-face teaching. In France, an estimated 75 percent of teachers participated in a national strike. In Chicago, 25,000 teachers took part in a powerful protest against the school reopening policies pursued by the Democratic Party on behalf of big business. There is also growing opposition among high school students in Australia to school reopenings while infections continue to rise. Educators and their supporters organised outside the politically bankrupt trade union apparatus in rank-and-file committees in Sri Lanka, Germany, Australia, the UK, Canada and elsewhere have discussed the need to stop reckless reopening of schools during the pandemic.

Internationally, there have been similar developments among autoworkers, postal workers, transport workers, and in other industries. It is to this social force—the international working class—that young people and students must turn in order to end the pandemic and save lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a symptom of a much more terminal disease—the decaying capitalist system. The pandemic crisis was predicted by modern science, and scientific knowledge also shows that it was entirely preventable and can still be ended. The suppression of the virus in China since the initial outbreak shows that scientifically-determined public health measures taken together—strict lockdowns, mask mandates, proper quarantining facilities, mass vaccination programs, and adequate contact tracing—can eliminate COVID-19. But this cannot be maintained in a single country. The eradication of COVID-19 requires an internationally-coordinated program of elimination.

However, this scientific program has been rejected by the tiny, wealthy minority as the closure of businesses would cut across their ability to make profits through the exploitation of the working class. The financial oligarchy in every country have continued to engorge themselves while workers, their families, small businesses and whole societies made to suffer. The drive to “reopen the economy,” including the resumption of in-person teaching in schools and universities, is an exercise in social murder at the expense of capitalist profits.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, published by the world Trotskyist movement of which the IYSSE is the global youth and student

movement, has characterised the pandemic as a “trigger event” in world history, akin to the First World War, which will have a profound impact on social consciousness. Millions of workers and youth internationally are gaining an education outside of schools and universities. That lesson is in the abject criminality of the capitalist system which places profits over lives.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality insists that the pandemic raises centrally the question of political program. Capitalism has not only produced the COVID-19 pandemic crisis but is also the cause of all the dire social problems confronting humanity: the drive to another catastrophic world war, environmental destruction, growing social inequality, and the threat of fascism.

The latest Oxfam briefing on inequality summed up the state of class relations in the world today. “A new billionaire has been created every 26 hours,” since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020 it stated. The report continued: “The world’s 10 richest men have doubled their fortunes, while over 160 million people are projected to have been pushed into poverty. Meanwhile, an estimated 17 million people have died from COVID-19—a scale of loss not seen since the Second World War.”

If the capitalist system cannot prevent misery and mass death for the world’s population, then it must be overthrown and replaced with a socialist system to address the pressing needs of humankind.

As the only genuinely socialist revolutionary club on campus, the IYSSE will fight to mobilise youth and students against the criminal response of capitalism to the pandemic, and for an international revolutionary movement of the working class for socialism. We urge you to take your place in this struggle today by joining the IYSSE club or by forming one at your school or university. Contact the IYSSE to find out more.



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