

May Day 2022: Australian ruling class promotes anti-China campaign

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This is the report delivered by Cheryl Crisp to the 2022 International May Day Online Rally held on May 1. Crisp is the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party in Australia. To view all speeches, visit wsws.org/mayday.

On behalf of the SEP Australia I would like to welcome everyone to the 2022 International May Day Online Rally.

Much has changed since we last celebrated the international day of the working class a year ago.

The unrestrained spread of COVID-19, in every single country with the exception of China, has condemned almost 20 million people to an unnecessary death. A virus which science, medicine and public health experts knew how to eliminate has been unleashed onto the world's population, by prioritizing production, profit and wealth.

The war in Ukraine, the result of long-held plans of US imperialism to dismember and destroy Russia, threatens the globe with World War III and nuclear war. This proxy war of NATO/US against Russia is using Ukraine as its staging ground and its people as cannon fodder.

For the working class internationally, it is faced with spiraling inflation, resulting in rising prices, food shortages, hunger and starvation, the outcome of both the pandemic and the war.

The situation in Australia, despite the constant mantra of exceptionalism and the "lucky" country, has been transformed. As is the case for most countries, the lives of people here are unrecognizable compared to just two years ago.

This time last year, Australia had recorded less than 30,000 infections. Today it is almost 6 million, with 96 percent of those cases occurring in the last five months.

The death toll by May 2021 was 910. Today it is 7,142, with 72 percent taking place since December 1, 2021.

The country is in the middle of an election campaign where a conspiracy exists between the Coalition government of Scott Morrison and the Labor Party opposition that COVID will not be mentioned. Despite growing infection rates, hospitalization and death, the narrative is "the pandemic is over."

The reason for this disaster is all the measures begrudgingly implemented by the government in March 2020, which had kept infections and deaths relatively low, have been scrapped. Everything: no lockdowns, testing, isolating, contact tracing and social distancing. Gone along with it is any reporting of the pandemic.

In its place is a frenzied war fever aimed at preparing the population for military confrontation with China. The entire political elite, with the Coalition and Labor in the lead, are outbidding each other in their frothing anti-China denunciations to prove who will best serve US imperialism and prosecute provocations against China.

Unbelievably, the United States, while inciting the war against Russia, which threatens catastrophe in Europe and more broadly, is simultaneously ramping up the drive to war against China.

The hysterical response by Australian politicians and the Biden administration to the signing of a security pact a week ago between China and the tiny nation of the Solomon Islands, with a population less than 700,000, and thousands of kilometers from both Australia and the US, is because it is seen as a threat to the long-term hegemony of the US in the Pacific, which it refers to as an "American lake."

Australian Defence Minister Dutton declared on ANZAC Day, the day the Australian ruling class

celebrates the slaughter of World War I, that “the way to preserve peace was to prepare for war.” Prime Minister Morrison threatens that if the Chinese establish a military presence in the Solomons, which he describes as “on Australia’s doorstep,” it would constitute “a red line” being crossed—a not-too-veiled threat at military intervention.

But it has been the Labor Party which has greeted the agreement with the most bellicose and almost unhinged denunciations. Labor shadow Foreign Minister Penny Wong described the failure of the government to prevent the signing of the agreement as the “worst foreign policy blunder in the Pacific since the end of World War II.”

Labor has aligned itself with the US response, which saw Kurt Campbell, the White House Indo-Pacific coordinator, dispatched to Honiara. He threatened like a mafia don that “if steps are taken to establish a de facto permanent [Chinese] military presence, power-projection capabilities, or a military installation, the United States would then have significant concerns and respond accordingly.” There is more than a hint that military action and a regime change operation are being considered.

The breathtaking hypocrisy is there for all to see. Ukraine has been supplied with unlimited lethal weaponry, military training and funding to purportedly preserve its right to join NATO. But when the Solomons exercises its right to sign a pact with China, it is threatened by the most powerful military nation on earth, backed by its deputy sheriff in the Pacific, the Australian government and the Labor Party.

The SEP makes central to its election campaign the fight for the unity of the Chinese and Australian working classes in the common struggle against capitalism, the source of war.

In fact the only war which should be waged is the one against COVID, but the ruling elite in every country has surrendered that fight, with ordinary people, the poor and the working class, paying the price.

As is the case internationally, it is the working class in this country who are most affected by the virus. 36 percent of all COVID-19 deaths occurred in the 20 percent most disadvantaged areas. Only 9.8 percent were in the most advantaged quintile. Immigrants to Australia have died from COVID-19 at more than two-and-a-half times the rate of those born here, with people

born in the Middle East dying at almost nine times the overall rate. Deaths from Long COVID are increasing at an alarming rate.

The pandemic and now the war in Ukraine have fueled a massive increase in the cost of living due to fuel and food price rises. Inflation in Australia in the last quarter has jumped to 5.1 percent, the largest increase for almost three decades, not counting the Goods and Services Tax imposed in 2000. This makes it higher than following the global financial crisis of 2008. For non-discretionary goods it is almost 7 percent. Wages, however, have stagnated for almost a decade.

The right to a roof over one’s head is in the past. Almost 10 percent of the poorest electorates in the country have up to 76 percent mortgage stress and that is before the slated interest rate rise, which could occur as early as next week. Of 46,000 rental properties available nationwide, only 32 are affordable for somebody on unemployment benefits.

It is these intolerable conditions that are driving workers into struggle and fight. Nurses, paramedics, health care workers and now teachers are taking strike action against the crippling workloads and sub-standard pay. A rebellion is developing against the government and the unions that enforce its demands.

The resolution of this mounting disaster cannot be through pressuring parties, governments or unions, but through the formation of independent rank-and-file committees in factories, schools, hospitals and neighborhoods, which can provide the leadership and socialist perspective needed to conduct these struggles.

In conclusion, on this May Day we particularly emphasize the international unity of the working class. We especially reach out to the Chinese working class, the largest on earth. The enemy of the workers here and internationally is not the Chinese masses, but the capitalist class. It is in unity with all sections of the working class that we must organize and fight for a socialist future.



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