

Australia and New Zealand end daily COVID-19 reporting: The “let it rip” conspiracy against the population

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Within days of one another, the Australian and New Zealand governments have announced the abrupt ending of daily COVID reporting, sharply curtailing their populations’ access to information about rates of infection, hospitalisations, vaccinations and deaths. Both countries will move to a stripped-back weekly report.

The change has been made as the fatality and case rates in both countries for 2022 dwarf those of the first two years of the pandemic, after their governments abolished successful public health measures and turned to a profit-driven “let it rip” program.

Under these conditions, the shift in reporting, declared without a hint of democratic discussion, much less a popular mandate, has the character of an internationally-coordinated conspiracy against working people.

It is of global significance, marking the overturn of the very last vestiges of a coordinated, public health response to the pandemic in any advanced capitalist country.

In Australia, the change to weekly reporting was quietly made last Friday, and was the subject of only a handful of cursory and uncritical reports in the domestic media. In New Zealand, Labour Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced the end of daily reporting yesterday, without any forewarning.

The decision has no scientific or medical basis. It has been sharply condemned by principled epidemiologists in both countries as an attack on the populations’ right to know about the still unfolding medical emergency and the ability of public health experts to track it.

The governments, however, are simply not interested. Instead, they are openly proclaiming that business interests are the supreme priority.

Ardern bluntly stated: “This is the time when finally, rather than feeling that COVID dictates what happens to us, our lives and our future, we take control back, as we continue to drive economic activity and our recovery.” In other words, all public health measures, however limited,

must be dispensed with to ensure full workforce participation in a bid to drive up production and corporate profits.

In line with this program, Ardern announced the end of all previous mask mandates, except in health and aged care settings. People who live with a COVID-positive individual will no longer be required to isolate, in a blow to the most basic infection control, while the last vaccination mandates, including for health workers, have been abolished.

Australia’s Labor government has similarly slashed the isolation time for COVID-infected people from seven to five days. The move, which experts have warned will result in up to half of all COVID cases mingling in the community while infectious, is transparently aimed at keeping workers on the job, even if they are carrying a potentially deadly virus. Masks will also no longer be required on domestic flights.

The clear purpose of the suppression of information is to promote the fraud that the “pandemic is over,” or at least the “worst is behind us,” to justify these dangerous measures.

But nothing could be further from the truth. In Australia, September 9, the last day of daily reporting, was the sixth deadliest of the entire pandemic, with 133 fatalities confirmed across the country. August witnessed the most deaths of any month, with 2,056 people losing their lives to the virus.

In New Zealand, deaths have soared from fewer than 30 late last year to almost 2,000. That has repeatedly placed the nation of five million people near the top of the list of global per capita fatalities, while the coronavirus has become the country’s leading cause of death.

The Australian and New Zealand governments are following a blueprint laid out by the Biden administration in the US on behalf of the major US banks and corporations.

In February, the US Department of Health and Human Services ended its system for hospitals to report daily COVID-19 deaths to the federal government.

At the time, the *World Socialist Web Site* was the only

publication to draw attention to the change and to highlight its far-reaching significance in the suppression of knowledge about the devastation wrought by the pandemic. *Business Insider* called the WSWS's coverage "misleading" but has never issued a correction, despite the end of daily COVID-19 reporting throughout almost the entire United States. All but four US states have ended their own daily reporting, making it impossible to chart fatalities on a day-by-day basis.

Britain announced the ending of its own daily reporting system the very same month as in the United States. Similar measures are underway in a host of countries and jurisdictions. In Canada, for instance, Ontario and several other provinces have already abolished their daily reporting.

The shift in Australia and New Zealand is particularly notable, because of the relative success of both countries in limiting deaths and infections earlier in the pandemic. They are thus a microcosm of the gulf between a scientifically-grounded response to the pandemic, even with limitations, and the naked "herd immunity" policy that both countries have since adopted.

The Australian state and federal governments always rejected a program to eliminate the virus, on the grounds that it would be too costly. They were nevertheless compelled under pressure from key sections of workers and health experts to institute safety measures, including lockdowns, which, notwithstanding a host of pro-business exemptions, repeatedly stamped out the virus. New Zealand was the only country in the world outside of China to consistently pursue elimination.

In the first two years of the pandemic, there were fewer than 400,000 infections in Australia and deaths stood at 2,239. For extended periods, safety measures ended all transmission of the virus.

As a consequence of the full "reopening of the economy" last December, those figures have skyrocketed to 10.1 million infections and 14,357 deaths. Because of the crashing of the testing system, a substantial majority of the country's 25 million people have likely been affected this year. Long COVID, a set of serious conditions associated with even "mild" cases, has debilitated up to 10 percent of the workforce.

In New Zealand, there had been fewer than 5,000 total infections and 30 deaths before the Ardern government overturned its elimination program in October last year. Now, official infections are at 1.76 million and deaths almost 2,000.

The transformation is a warning of what would occur if China dispensed with its elimination strategy, as has been demanded by the major imperialist governments, corporations and media. Hundreds of thousands or millions

would die in the country of 1.4 billion, joining the estimated 20 million who have perished around the world since the pandemic began.

The protracted assault on China's elimination program is not only because of its impact on the activities of global finance and big business, but also because it demonstrates that there is an alternative to the homicidal policies of "herd immunity" implemented everywhere else.

The developments in Australia and New Zealand are also of note because in both countries the untrammelled spread of the virus is being presided over by a social-democratic government.

In New Zealand, Ardern, presented in the media as a saint-like figure, brushes away the mass infection and death her government has unleashed, instead proclaiming the all-importance of "economic activity." In Australia, Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says nothing about the record daily fatalities, and pledges to business that there will never be a return to lockdowns.

This line goes hand in hand with the Labor governments presiding over Australia and New Zealand's ever greater integration into the US confrontations with Russia and China, threatening world war, and the implementation of budget austerity and attacks on the wages, jobs and conditions of workers.

The "let it rip" program underscores not only that the social-democratic parties have completely abandoned any pretense of representing working people, and have become the most aggressive proponents of corporate interests, it also demonstrates that the fight to end the pandemic and eliminate the deadly virus will not be carried out by capitalist governments or in one country alone.

Instead, what is required is an international fight for the scientific measures required to progressively halt transmission and to finally end the pandemic. The international working class, whose interests are in health and life, not profit, is the only social force capable of carrying this out. The fight against the pandemic must be inscribed upon the banner of its resurgent strikes, protests and class battles.



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