

# Australian workers support online rank-and-file public meeting to fight government removal of COVID-19 safety measures

Our reporters

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*Health workers, educators and other workers have denounced Australian governments' "let it rip" COVID-19 policies and enthusiastically endorsed the forthcoming meeting of the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) and the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), on Sunday, November 20 at 3 p.m. (AEDT).*

*The meeting will outline a political perspective, including the building of independent rank-and-file committees, to unify health workers, teachers and other sections of workers in the fight for decent wages, working conditions and the elimination of COVID-19.*

*This week, the Socialist Equality Party (Australia) published a video of health workers and educators explaining the necessity for a unified fightback by all sections of the working class. We urge readers to share this video on social media, read the October 13 joint statement issued by the CFPE and HWRFC, and register here to attend the online public meeting.*

**Tom, a medical specialist at a New South Wales public hospital:**

The Socialist Equality Party is the only organisation that fights to unite workers across all fronts. Uniting workers is why I think it is important to participate in the November 20 rank-and-file public meeting.

Unification is the key. Marx and Engels thought it was the key, that's why we have the phrase "workers of the world, unite," not "unions of the world, unite." They distilled the essence of the message down to this. It's the sine qua non of our movement.

We need to form rank-and-file committees across all professional bodies. We are divided artificially into

different professional bodies but we are actually all workers. That's how you have to see it.

The reason why you have to come to this meeting is that it is not just for doctors, or nurses, or wardsmen, or postmen. It's for everyone. Without unity, we have nothing. In a previous nurses' strike, I urged non-nurses to donate some of their pay so that other nurses could go on strike.

We need general strikes to shut the whole system down. Railway workers have tried rolling strikes. Teachers and health workers have held isolated actions, so then the government can say: "Look at the railway workers, they are holding up the whole city." If everyone went out together, then they would have to listen, they wouldn't have a choice.

**Lisa, a disability worker from Sydney:**

I will be attending the public meeting on November 20. As a disability worker, I'm angry about the clawing back of very significant portions of NDIS [National Disability Insurance Scheme] packages, which is impacting on the quality of life for participants.

I'm concerned about staff shortages, which are hitting care as well as the welfare of staff called upon to take up the vacant shifts. Many staff are off with COVID. New staff can be hard to recruit because wages are low and opportunities for promotion are rare.

I'm especially angry about vulnerable people being sacrificed to the risk of severe COVID and death so that corporations can keep making profits for the rich. All of us are also being subjected to the likelihood of loss of years of our lives, long-COVID and all other health implications of COVID that we don't yet understand.

**Max, public hospital nurse from Queensland,**

**resigned in January because of the dangerous pandemic conditions in his hospital:**

I took early retirement because of the COVID infections. We were getting overwhelmed at work, and I just thought, “I can’t do this anymore.” I know others did the same. We had no extra staffing, even though we had to test thousands of people.

The politicians were so disheartening. They were all screaming for safety restrictions to be lifted, while we were dressed up like Ghostbusters to test people... We just felt worthless.

After I tested positive for COVID and had to isolate, management stopped the random testing of staff so that people wouldn’t have to isolate.

We are seeing the absolute subordination of human life to corporate profit. People did support border closures and other restrictions. This is what got the Labor Party re-elected in Queensland at the last state election but now they’ve scrapped all the protections.

**Josh, a barber from Newcastle, New South Wales:**

I agree that regular people need to unite internationally and support the idea of rank-and-file committees. There needs to be a unified struggle of workers.

We need to fight back somehow. I know someone who worked on a traineeship. He worked over 200 hours of unpaid work but when he raised the issue with management, he got the sack.

I currently work as a barber, and you do hear horror stories. I know a couple of guys in Sydney who were working at a barber shop. They only getting paid around \$30 a day but working the equivalent of full-time, at least 40–50 hours a week.

**Malcolm, an unemployed worker from regional NSW:**

During the pandemic, capitalist governments said “thank you, thank you, frontline heroes,” but then they cut wages here, cut wages there. The unions as well as the Labor party have been responsible for this.

Workers need their own independent organisations because of trade union betrayals, they are not for the workers. People should come to the public meeting because it will tell the truth to workers.

**Katie from Victoria:**

I was a teacher in a Victorian school. Due to health concerns about COVID infection, I decided to resign. The air purifiers were phased into classrooms at the end

of last year and beginning of this year.

My problem was the lifting of mandatory masking. I no longer felt safe. Removing mandatory isolation will only increase the spread in schools. I cannot imagine how this will not impact on staff illness and disrupt education.

Schools are communities and teachers care about kids. I do think the Victorian measures have been far better than other states. I am concerned we are no longer leading, but following for the lowest common denominator.

The AEU [Australian Education Union] agreement in Victoria was a shocker. It was effectively a wage cut and there was so little focus on OHS and the pandemic, issues with camps etc. When I finalised leaving teaching, I left the union and told them their actions on OHS and safety were poor.

Teachers are incredibly overwhelmed after two years of the pandemic and now face the chore of either pretending to themselves that the pandemic is over or looking at their colleagues and realising they are taking immense risks with their health. People we know who have Long-COVID are in denial about the risks.

Most teachers are going to get a real shock with this new wave about to happen. It’s happening so quickly that the data from overseas is unclear on how bad this variant will be for hospitalisations. But with waning immunity and impacts of the previous wave [it is] not good.



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