Albanese government silent as coronavirus death toll passes 16,000

Australians Against COVID to hold protest vigil over "let it rip" policies

Richard Phillips
25 November 2022

Australians Against COVID, an ad hoc organisation of disabled and immune-compromised people, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups, will be holding a vigil outside federal parliament in Canberra this Sunday. It is part of a nationwide "day of action" to protest the socially criminal "let it rip" policies being imposed by federal, state and territory governments, led by the Labor and Liberal-National parties.

The vigil, at 2 p.m. this Sunday, will acknowledge the deaths of over 16,000 people from the coronavirus throughout Australia since the pandemic began—13,000 of whom died in the past year—and demand the full-scale introduction of COVID-safe measures. Organisers are urging those unable to join the vigil for geographic and/or health reasons to take pictures of their front door and tweet it to the prime minister @AlboMP and to use the hashtag #VigilAgainstCOVID.

"This week marks the tragic milestone of 16,000 Australians dead from COVID-19 while untold numbers of sick and disabled people are trapped in their homes without end," Australians Against COVID spokesperson Sam Connor told the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS).

"With governments abandoning lockdown measures, 13 percent of clinically vulnerable people in the UK continue to shield. If Australia follows, then over a million could be shielding here… COVID is not over, and we urge governments to urgently listen and put lives before profits," she said.

Craig Wallace, another Australians Against COVID spokesperson and life-long fighter for the rights of the disabled, said: "We want a public commitment from all governments to end the current uncontrolled transmission of COVID in Australia through clean air, masks, distancing and sensible health measures.

"We seek guaranteed rights to work, study and operate from home, essential spaces to be COVID-safe, health and disability supports for people with long COVID, community development for the isolated, access to in-reach care, testing and treatments and better access to RATs, PCRs and free masks and HEPA filters," Wallace said.

Australian Against COVID was established following the "National Cabinet's" decision in late September to end the requirement for those infected with COVID-19 to isolate and the abolition of federal pandemic leave payments for COVID-positive workers.

Driven by the demands of big business, the unanimous National Cabinet decision, which allows COVID to freely circulate everywhere, was the culmination of an ongoing onslaught against a scientific response to the pandemic. It was a profit-driven declaration of war against the working class and the most vulnerable, and a public health system already weakened by decades of cost cutting.

With the unwavering support of the trade unions, Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has unleashed measures that his predecessor, Liberal-National coalition Prime Minister Scott Morrison, could not. All remnants of a scientific approach to the deadly virus have been junked and replaced with "personal responsibility." It was "the end of COVID exceptionalism," Australian Chief Medical Officer Paul Kelly declared.

As is the case internationally, nothing must be allowed to get in the way of the profits and production of the major corporations. The immunocompromised and elderly, and the working class as whole are

considered dispensable.

The predictable response of the Albanese government and its state counterparts to the grim milestone of 16,000 deaths, a 400-fold increase on this time last year, was a stony silence. While the corporate media acknowledged the death toll, it maintains a steady stream of articles downplaying the deepening public health crisis, promoting unscientific claims and gaslighting those fighting for COVID-safe measures.

A *Sydney Morning Herald* article this week entitled "The next COVID wave is here. Here's what you're in for" claimed, citing University of Melbourne epidemiologist Professor Tony Blakely, that there would not be large-scale deaths. This was because, Blakely declared without providing a shred of evidence, "We are all getting more immunity from natural infection, even if vaccine uptake is falling and immunity is waning in the population."

The claim that people will be safe due to "herd immunity" through infection is an outright lie, as are other unscientific but widely promoted claims, such as "children don't get infected."

Scientific analysis has irrefutably proven that there is no "immunity from natural infection" and that every infection weakens an individual's defence systems, undermining their ability to fight the deadly virus and increasing the chance of contracting Long COVID.

This Sunday's vigil outside parliament by Australians Against COVID, and its online social media day of action, is an important and politically significant event and should be supported by the widest numbers of workers, students and youth. We urge WSWS readers to share this article extensively on social media.

The vigil is the first and, thus far, the only in-person protest called in Australia against the deeply reactionary COVID policies being implemented by state and federal governments, aided and abetted by the unions.

It is a crucial step in the fight to unify all sections of the working class and the most oppressed sections of the population behind the campaign for a zero-COVID policy that places lives above profit—a demand that must be fought for through the establishment of rank-and-file safety committees in workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods, independent of the unions and the capitalist parties.

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