

Australians Against COVID holds vigil for 16,000 COVID deaths

Our reporters

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Approximately 40 people gathered in Canberra on Sunday to mark the death of over 16,000 people in Australia from COVID-19, and to protest the government's policies that are responsible. Despite this horrific death toll, Sunday's event was the first in-person protest to highlight the consequences of the bipartisan "let it rip" policies of state and federal governments in Australia which were unleashed on the population in December 2021.

The event was organised by Australians Against COVID, which was formed in September after the Albanese Labor Government abolished all remaining protections against COVID-19 including mandatory mask wearing, compulsory isolation periods, pandemic leave payments, daily reports of testing and death figures and mandatory reporting of positive cases.

Opening the event, Craig Wallace, a spokesperson for Australians Against COVID, said: "We gather to do what our leaders have failed to do, to mourn the deaths of over 16,000 Australians... When a cricketer dies from a stray ball we grieve for days. When a monarch dies, we grieve for months. So, what is different this time? Well, these are the deaths of people our leaders and business have decided are OK. Our friends, families, workmates and leaders have been sacrificed to a preventable disease which has been allowed to spread for reasons of profit, opportunism, lies, conspiracies and political cowardice. This is social murder. This is eugenics."

Wallace demonstrated that disabled people are being disproportionately affected by the pandemic. People with a disability account for nearly 60 percent of all COVID-19 deaths in the UK, while those with an intellectual disability are 3 to 5 times more likely to die. In South Korea disabled people are 6.5 times more likely to perish from COVID-19. Studies in Canada demonstrate those with down syndrome died at a rate 6.6 times higher than those without intellectual disabilities. In Australia there have been 25,000 COVID-19 cases for those on the National Disability Insurance Scheme and 4,000 deaths in residential aged care.

"Governments have sought to minimise the impact of COVID and to gaslight our communities," Wallace said. "State premiers held daily press conferences where they sneered and scoffed at the deaths of older Australians and disabled people

as coming from 'underlying conditions,' as if being disabled was a crime or a sin inflicted by an angry god."

Long COVID is "threatening to become a mass disabling event on a scale equal to HIV, Polio and World War II," Wallace said. "400,000 people are likely to be left with disabilities due to COVID," but they cannot "assume that the support will be there."

"Governments have failed to raise the base level of income support, people on Newstart unemployment payments cannot afford to rent a house and people on the Disability Pension are dying of pneumonia because they can't keep their home heated."

Wallace said Australians Against COVID were asking for "A public commitment from all governments to end the current uncontrolled transmission of COVID in Australia."

Disabled people needed to be given access to "work, education, medical care and essential services" either online or in COVID-safe spaces. Greater support had to be provided to those who cannot leave their home due to the risk of COVID infection. Long COVID needed to be recognised as a disability. Masks and HEPA filters had to be available for all at-risk people.

Wallace stated that the situation where disabled, sick, and immuno-compromised people were left to die in corridors could go on no longer. There should be, he said, a national memorial and minute's silence in parliament to respect those who have died.

Sam Connor from Australians Against COVID said that if the 16,000 people who died of COVID in Australia were at the protest they would fill the field. Connor said that in Nazi Germany disabled people and those deemed "asocial or work shy" were branded with the inverted black triangle and were killed in concentration camps as part of the Nazi's eugenics program. It is now used as a symbol of the oppression of disabled people.

Connor said she and Nicole Lee, president of People with Disability, had flown up to Canberra to "engage as many parliamentarians as we can, yet again."

Lee explained that at memorials "it is customary to read out the names of people who have died or even the numbers of people, but this has been denied us as the numbers are so great

and there is undercounting.” Lee then read out the number of dead, which includes every state and territory in the country, most of which have died this year. As of the Friday before the rally the official death toll was 5,540 in New South Wales, 5,593 in Victoria, 2,317 in Queensland, 750 in Western Australia, 1,067 in South Australia, 201 in Tasmania and 129 in the Australian Capital Territory.

In introducing Cheryl Crisp, National Secretary of the Socialist Equality Party, Craig Wallace said: “We are in a life and death struggle. In that struggle disabled people should look to the political allies prepared to resist the sacrifice of our lives. You will notice that we don’t have many political parties here today. None of them speak about COVID.

“I have admired the principled stand of the International Committee of the Fourth International and their Australian representatives in the Socialist Equality Party who alone have been prepared to speak truth to power in the pandemic.”

Crisp noted that this vigil was the first and only in-person meeting called to oppose the official policy of ‘let it rip.’ She stated that “outside our own political party which internationally and here has held multiple global online webinars and dozens of online discussions and meetings, not one union, not one political party including those who purport to be socialist has warned, opposed, or attempted to inform ordinary people of the catastrophe that is the pandemic.”

Crisp said it was necessary “to understand why governments of every persuasion have adopted” the murderous, and homicidal “let it rip” policy. “It is not a mistake,” Crisp said, but the result of “conscious, premeditated decisions in the interests of finance, production, profits, and the wealth of the tiny elite. In fact, we are meeting at the scene of the crime, Parliament House.”

She said that when the pandemic began the “first thing to be dispensed with was parliament itself” with the creation of the National Cabinet, an “extra-parliamentary, undemocratic and unelected body made up predominately of state Labor premiers.” This was accompanied by former Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s appropriation of 5 ministerial portfolios, with plans to make it 6. Morrison had admitted that this was because of ruling class fears that the COVID crisis would provoke “civil disruption, extensive fatalities and economic collapse.”

“Where there is a crime scene there are criminals,” Crisp said. “At this point I must counsel caution. Even in the event that the National Cabinet granted your request to speak to them... it would fall on deaf ears... This is not an Australian or national phenomena but the response of capitalism.”

Crisp noted that a July 2022 Open Letter by 18 eminent doctors and scientists demanding the government rescind the threats to revoke the professional deregistration of Zero-COVID activist Dr David Berger was not even replied to.

“That 22 million people globally have died from a predicted, predictable and preventable disease, predominately the elderly, sick, disabled and poor working people, is also not an

accident,” Crisp said. “This is the real face of capitalism. And a system which condemns its poor, its most vulnerable and its youth to infection, illness, long-term disabling events, and possible death is a system that will not think twice about launching war.”

“While these governments prepare for war abroad, they carry out war against the working class and the poor at home. With rising inflation, interest rates and cost of living, the plummeting wages of workers don't go anywhere near being able to provide what is needed for life. We live in a system where none of the basic requirements of life are guaranteed for the world's population. It is a system which has no right to exist.

“There is only one force which can prevent the descent to barbarism. It is the working class, the class which produces all wealth, that can ensure capitalism, whose continued existence threatens life as we know it, is dispensed with and replaced with a socialist system. A system based on the needs of society as a whole not the profit levels for a tiny few, a system based on equality and democracy. It is for that reason we argue for the building of rank-and-file committees, in workplaces, whether hospitals, schools, factories or offices but also in communities which are increasingly faced with impossible conditions.

“Your friends and allies are not in the corridors of this building or in the union offices populated by highly paid bureaucrats who act as the policemen of the working class on behalf of governments and business. Your friends are workers and that is who we fight to mobilise in committees independent of the parties which defend capitalism, of the union apparatuses and those who support them. Workers must take back control of their factories and communities. Our party will assist in this endeavour.”



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