

Excess deaths in Australia highest since World War II

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In the midst of the New South Wales elections, the Actuaries Institute's COVID-19 Mortality Working Group announced the staggering conclusion that "there were nearly 20,000 more deaths in 2022 than would have been expected if the pandemic had not happened."

The Group's analysis was based on data released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) which reported similar figures last month. Excess deaths for January to November 2022 from all causes were 22,886, indicating that the final figure for the year would be at least 25,000.

While the Group and the ABS used slightly different methods, the conclusion was the same: 2022 saw the highest level of excess deaths since World War II. The huge death toll is a damning indictment of the criminal "let it rip" policies of all Australian governments, along with the political and media establishment as a whole.

At 12–15 percent, the 2022 rise is ten times the usual fluctuation from year to year. Most of the excess was directly caused by COVID-19, and the Group makes clear that the remaining deaths can only be explained by the pandemic.

As a result, life expectancy in Australia is now falling. Last year infectious diseases expert Professor Brendan Crabb pointed out that "excess deaths in Australia are normally negative, less than zero. That's why life expectancy has increased for the last 70 years in Australia." But in 2021–22, life expectancy actually fell by 0.4 years, according to the Centre for Population.

Yet, the release of these devastating figures has barely rated a mention in the media. And in the NSW election campaign, none of the establishment parties is even speaking about the pandemic, its tragic impact on families in the state and across Australia, or the crisis that it has created for the public health and hospital

system.

The entire political establishment is responsible for imposing policies that put corporate profit ahead of lives and health.

NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet and former Prime Minister Scott Morrison were the public faces of the elimination of health restrictions that led to the first Omicron surge in late 2021. But they were implementing policies devised by the Labor-dominated National Cabinet. Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews worked hand-in-hand with Perrottet to force the return to work and schools in the two most populous states.

In NSW, 5,866 people have died from COVID-19 since December 31, 2021. The Liberal-National government was in power, but Labor bears equal responsibility. At the NSW Labor campaign launch last weekend, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese touted the fact that NSW Labor leader Chris Minns had "chosen to be constructive during the pandemic," rather than oppose or even question the homicidal policies.

Moreover, the Albanese federal Labor government that came to power last May has continued and deepened the dismantling of even the most basic public health measures. Since Albanese took office, federal and state Labor governments have eliminated: mask and vaccine mandates, isolation requirements, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing, pandemic leave payments and the daily reporting of statistics.

As a direct result of Labor's deliberate evisceration of public health measures, more people died in Australia from COVID-19 in the first 28 weeks of Albanese's term than in more than two years under Morrison. To date, 11,494 COVID-19 deaths have been reported since the federal election less than ten months ago, 59 percent of the overall toll.

Insofar as Labor, the Coalition and the Greens refer to

COVID-19 at all, they act as if the pandemic is over, allowing the virus to circulate forever. New, more virulent, vaccine-evading and deadly variants will develop without impediment or control, subjecting workers to endless reinfection.

None of this is inevitable from the standpoint of epidemiology or medical science; the measures necessary to end the pandemic are well understood. But a scientific approach is incompatible with capitalism, in which every aspect of policy is dictated by the financial and corporate elite.

The Socialist Equality Party and its sister parties around the world are the only political organisations opposing this murderous program and fighting for a policy of elimination as the only means of protecting working people.

The SEP has made ending the COVID-19 pandemic a central part of its campaign for the NSW state election. None of the pressing issues workers face can be resolved while they are forced to live under the constant threat of long-term illness or death.

The SEP election statement says:

- Health and lives before profit!
- Demand the immediate reintroduction of safety measures: universal indoor masking, free mass testing, contact-tracing, air filtration, mass vaccine rollout and, where necessary, lockdowns with full compensation for small businesspeople and workers.
- The pandemic can and must be finally ended!

We call on workers to build rank-and-file committees, independent of the trade unions that collaborated with governments to force a return to work and the end of all health restrictions. By taking matters into their own hands, workers can initiate a fight for their interests, including the basic right to a safe workplace, free from infectious disease.

Ultimately, what is needed is a global fight to eliminate the deadly virus. The 21 million excess deaths around the world during the pandemic, as calculated by the *Economist*, serve as a horrific demonstration that such a fight is impossible under capitalism, which subordinates every aspect of human life, including its very existence, to the profit interests of the financial and corporate elite.

The elimination of COVID-19 requires the independent mobilisation of the working class, informed by the best available scientific and medical

advice. The experience of the pandemic, together with the mounting threat of a catastrophic world war, climate change and growing social crisis is an indictment of capitalism. It raises the need to fight for socialism, the reorganisation of society to meet social need, not profit.

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