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Actor and author Hannah Diviney denounces Australian Labor government’s attacks on the disabled

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Hannah Diviney, who suffers from cerebral palsy, spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* last week, a few days after she addressed the Senate Inquiry into the Albanese government’s planned assault on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Diviney, an actress, author and well-known disability rights advocate, denounced Labor’s measures, telling the Senate that it was a direct assault on the lives of the disabled and their families.

Labor plans to slash $37.8 billion from NDIS over the next four years, removing about 300,000 disabled people from the scheme and drastically cutting its services. Access to the NDIS will no longer be based primarily on a medical diagnosis, but on arbitrary examinations of “functional assessments.” Future participants will have to prove that they have sought every conceivable “alternative” to the NDIS.

This brutal agenda, which is part of a broader austerity offensive, targeting public education, healthcare and other essential social spending, is to pay for record increases in military spending in preparation for war.

Diviney began her writing career, aged 15, at *Mamamia* and went on to become the co-founder and editor-in-chief of *Missing Perspectives*. She has written for numerous Australian and international newspapers and in 2023 published a memoir, *I’ll Let Myself In*. Diviney made her acting debut in *Latecomers* (2022) an SBS-TV miniseries, followed by a leading role in the 2024 feature film *Audrey*. In 2025, she appeared in the “Cape Rock Killer” episode of Fox Showcase’s *The Twelve*.

The following interview has been edited for clarity and length.

World Socialist Web Site: You told the Senate Inquiry you could not work, travel or participate socially without NDIS support. Could you elaborate on that?

Hannah Diviney: My disability means that I need assistance with almost every aspect of personal care. That includes everything from getting out of bed and getting dressed to going to the bathroom and managing day-to-day tasks.

I can’t drive a car, use a knife safely, or prepare a meal independently but am incredibly fortunate because I still live at home with my parents. But at 26, almost 27-years-old, relying solely on them for my care is not something I want because it doesn’t allow me to develop fully as my own person.

My parents have their own lives—careers, ambitions, and interests of their own—and I don’t think it’s fair or healthy to expect them to put all that aside to care for me full-time. They would do it if they had to, but my parents are getting older and, at a certain point, may not be physically able to keep doing that. The more they are forced to sacrifice their own health and wellbeing to care for me, the more support they themselves are likely to need in the future.

WSWS: You have a career—you’re a writer and an actor—would that have been possible without your support through the NDIS?

HD: Writing probably would have been possible in the sense that it’s a relatively solitary activity and I can type independently. But being an author is about much more than writing a book. It’s about attending events, promoting your work, building relationships and maintaining a public presence. None of that would have been possible if I hadn’t been physically able to get to the places I’ve needed to be over the last few years. As for acting, there’s absolutely no way I could work on a film or television set without a support worker. That simply wouldn’t be possible without the NDIS.

WSWS: What will happen to NDIS participants if social and community participation funding is slashed?

HD: Disabled people would disappear from public life and be confined to their homes with little real autonomy or choice, which is not what the NDIS was designed to do. In fact, choice and control are supposed to be among its core principles. It would also see a profound deterioration in the mental health of the disability community. There is already a severe mental health crisis nationally and these pressures will intensify for disabled people.

People will die if the government’s changes proceed. If you deliberately remove a disabled person’s ability to participate in society, then many will begin to question whether they have value, whether they belong, and whether there is a place for them in the wider community. Those are consequences that can and should be anticipated.

WSWS: The government is attempting to justify its cuts by claiming there are people with “low needs” on the NDIS, such as those with autism, who should be removed from the scheme entirely. Can you comment?

HD: Classifying disability or neurodivergence through an arbitrary hierarchy of low, medium and high needs is a slippery slope.

There are obviously cases where people’s support needs are highly significant. To use cerebral palsy—which is my condition—as an example, there are people whose only independent functions may be breathing and swallowing, and even those can be difficult. Objectively speaking, their support needs are greater than mine.

But it becomes difficult when these classifications are made by people who may not have lived experience of disability or specialised knowledge. Unless you live it, understand it and have spent time with people who experience that disability—either personally or as carers—it’s extremely difficult to make those distinctions accurately.

This means that people who genuinely need support, but whose needs are less immediately visible or require a deeper understanding of their complexity, could fall through the cracks.

The government says there will be other systems and structures outside the NDIS to support those they intend to remove from the scheme. But I am not aware of alternative structures that support people in the way the NDIS does. Developing those systems after people have already lost access to support is a mistake.

WSWS: A centrepiece of the cuts is a move away from medical diagnoses towards "functional assessments." Government spokespeople have indicated that people deemed to be capable of carrying out daily activities under the new assessments regime will either be kicked off the scheme or have their support reduced.

HD: This is deeply problematic because a functional assessment only captures a very limited snapshot of someone's life. Disabilities can fluctuate significantly from day to day depending on factors such as fatigue, environment, health, stress and countless other variables.

Taking a brief assessment period and treating it as a complete representation of a person's life is inherently flawed. It also disregards the expertise of medical and allied health professionals. We've already heard concerns that reports and evidence provided by specialists are not being given the weight they deserve.

That's alarming because it devalues the opinions of people who understand disability and who have often worked with individuals for years. There are also serious concerns about who will conduct these assessments and whether they will have appropriate expertise in the specific disabilities they are assessing.

Disability is highly complex. It requires knowledge, experience and context. Most importantly, the ability to perform a particular task or tick a particular box does not automatically mean someone has a good quality of life or no longer requires support. We are talking about people's ability to live independently, participate in society, pursue education and employment, maintain relationships, and have a sense of dignity. These things matter and they matter regardless of whether someone is currently disabled or disabled in the future. Disability can touch any person's life at any time.

WSWS: Labor claims its measures are about sustainability and stopping fraud. How do you respond to this narrative?

HD: I don't think it's true. The government's claim that its reforms address fraud, but it targets participants more than providers. Cutting people's social and community participation funding by 50 percent—and limiting disabled people's ability to go out and experience the world fully—is not the right response.

An article in the *Australian Financial Review* a few months ago had a headline claiming that $12 billion had been spent on movies, haircuts and walks. It completely misrepresented the fact that people who receive social and community participation funding need it so they can employ support workers to help them physically access those activities.

The funding doesn't pay for the movie ticket or the hair cut but the support required to get there and participate, a privilege most able-bodied people do not even realise they have. The article, and especially the headline which misrepresented the facts, was designed to encourage resentment toward disabled people during a cost-of-living crisis when everyone is struggling to stay afloat.

WSWS: Can you speak about the far-reaching powers given to the health minister in the legislation to eliminate entire sections of the NDIS?

HD: I'm deeply concerned that any minister would get that level of unilateral authority in almost any context. No one individual should have that much power over the lives of so many people. Concentrating that degree of authority in the hands of a single minister raises serious issues and feels uncomfortably close to allowing politicians to play God with people's lives. This is not appropriate in a democracy.

WSWS: What responses have you received from disabled people, families and the broader community since you spoke at the Senate Inquiry?

HD: The response has been incredible. To be honest, my phone has come close to exploding from the sheer volume of messages, emails and notes people have sent. Many have said they're grateful that I've used my platform to speak openly and honestly about what's happening. That's incredibly humbling.

There are many people in the disability community who would love to share their experiences but can't easily do so, whether because of communication barriers, the nature of their disability or other limitations. That some people feel seen and heard through my advocacy is not something I take lightly. Being able to help amplify those voices is something I'm very proud of.

WSWS: What precedent does it set if the government succeeds in pushing through these cuts. Many people have pointed to the billions of dollars available for military expenditure.

HD: It sets a dangerous precedent. It's a slippery slope. If the government can justify these kinds of measures against disabled people, then it becomes easier to justify similarly harsh measures elsewhere.

As for military spending, I'm not a defence expert and I don't pretend to understand every strategic consideration but from my perspective, supporting some of the nation's most vulnerable citizens is more important than purchasing additional military hardware.

It seems reasonable to ask whether there are other ways of addressing budget pressures before targeting disabled people. You could have discussions about taxation. You could have discussions about corporate profits or any number of other revenue measures. I don't think the disability community should be the government's first target.