

Australia: SEP meeting discusses how to fight Labor government's attack on National Disability Insurance Scheme

Our reporters
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An online public meeting on August 16 attended by National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) recipients, carers, teachers, health practitioners and other workers discussed the necessity for a unified political struggle against the Labor government's cost-cutting assault on the NDIS.

Co-hosted by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Committee for Public Education (CFPE) and the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC), the event attracted over 130 participants from across Australia, as well as attendees from New Zealand, Sri Lanka and the United States.

The meeting provided a devastating exposure of the Albanese Labor government's legislation, with speakers explaining the international context of Labor's austerity measures.

"Across every advanced capitalist country, social programs are being systematically dismantled," SEP Assistant National Secretary Max Boddy, the main speaker, told the meeting. He noted US President Donald Trump's assault on health and other social programs and the slashing of spending by the German government to fund rearmament, pointing out that the Albanese government was establishing an equally vicious austerity benchmark in Australia.

"The Bill contains the single largest cut to a government social program in Australian history. \$38 billion over four years. It is the centrepiece of a budget that slashes \$63.8 billion from social spending. More than 240,000 existing participants will be removed from the NDIS by 2031 and another 110,000 denied access. Almost two-thirds of those targeted are children," he said.

Boddy detailed the consequences of the planned cuts to social and community participation programs and how the "functional assessment" component of the new legislation would be used to strip the disabled of necessary assistance. The new measures, he continued, could also exclude all disabilities resulting from workplace or motor vehicle accidents, explicitly decreeing that government funding does not have to cover the actual cost of required support. It also grants dictatorial, unchallengeable powers to the health minister to unilaterally slash funding to whole categories of disability support by up to 99 percent.

"These cuts will cost lives—and they have already," he

warned, pointing to a participant who died after care was reduced, alongside recent tragic murder-suicides linked to the horrendous pressures families face without adequate disability support.

"The same budget that guts disability care," he continued, "is increasing annual military spending to \$60 billion and locks in \$368 billion for the AUKUS nuclear submarine program aimed at China. Labor is extracting the lifeblood of people with disability, particularly children, to fund this war drive."

Boddy explained how the Greens are playing a critical role in channelling popular opposition to the NDIS cuts into dead-end appeals to the Liberal-National Coalition.

"The Greens are a safety valve," he said. "Their function is to ensure that the anger this assault generates is vented harmlessly into parliamentary procedure and buried there. They have ensured that no genuine opposition has emerged and the Bill will become law."

Boddy exposed the role played by the trade union bureaucracy which has offered its assistance to Labor in imposing the measures. "Not a single union has called a strike, a walkout, or any form of industrial action against this brutal assault on the disabled," he said.

HRWFC National Convenor Julia Thomas focused on the catastrophic consequences of the NDIS cuts on an already collapsing public healthcare system. "Those forced off the NDIS, or whose supports are reduced, will have no choice but to rely on public hospitals and emergency departments when their conditions deteriorate," she stated.

Thomas said public health was already underfunded, understaffed, and stretched past its breaking point, citing reports from New South Wales where only 57 percent of life-threatening cases were seen on time, and one in ten patients waited over 24 hours for a bed.

These conditions are mirrored nationwide, she continued, pointing out that hospitals in the state of Victoria saw thousands of patients stranded in Emergency Departments for over 24 hours and cited the example of Ballarat Base Hospital where doctors reported that wait times regularly exceeded 40 hours.

Thomas referred to a recent survey revealing that two-thirds of nurses regularly contemplate leaving the profession and recalled the unprecedented mass resignation of more than 200 public staff psychiatrists in January 2025 over low pay and chronic understaffing.

She also detailed how the health unions, including the nurses and midwives federation, have suppressed their members' opposition over decades while negotiating and then enforcing government agreements. She concluded that a genuine fightback requires building independent rank-and-file committees in every hospital, democratically controlled by the workers themselves.

CFPE national convenor Sue Phillips explained how public schools would have to absorb the consequences of the NDIS cuts. Children were at the very centre of the attack, she said, with 64 percent of the 241,000 participants slated to lose access by 2030, aged 18 or under, the vast majority diagnosed with autism or developmental delays. Under the new laws, she continued, children aged eight and under with mild-to-moderate support needs would be denied NDIS plans altogether.

Phillips exposed government claims that these children would be referred to a state-based "Thriving Kids" arrangement. This was a sham, she said, because the scheme did not yet exist and the states have said they did not have the resources.

Labor's NDIS measures will impose a massive burden onto a public school system already buckling under a decades-long crisis of underfunding and staff shortages. In Victoria, she said, the cuts are expected to force teachers and education support (ES) staff to complete an additional 15,000 to 22,000 time-consuming Disability Inclusion Profiles, vastly increasing their administrative workloads.

Phillips shared interviews with ES staff who described being forced to perform specialised medical tasks and manage severe behavioural crises without proper training, while routinely facing physical violence and extreme burnout. She condemned the Australian Education Union for its silence and complicity over Labor's measures.

The question-and-answer portion of the meeting demonstrated the profound concern and political engagement of participants.

One NDIS recipient commented in the chat that they were on the verge of losing support but said traditional protests were ignored by the media and that teachers and nurses faced immense risks if they went on strike.

Boddy responded by explaining that protests appealing to the government or the unions were a dead end because they accept the framework of the profit system.

The establishment of a network of rank-and-file committees, he continued, was in order to develop independent struggle by the working class to fight for their rights. This had to be connected to a socialist perspective to wrest control of society's resources away from governments and the financial

elite and to reorganise society to meet human needs not capitalist profits.

Another question was raised about defence spending, asking how Australia could defend itself militarily from China and other countries, without maintaining its military budget.

Boddy and other speakers explained that the threat of war stems from the systemic crisis of global capitalism, with Australian imperialism acting as Washington's accomplice in preparing for a catastrophic conflict with China.

The struggle for socialism and basic social and democratic rights is not about the military defence of national borders but fighting for the international unity of the global working class against the capitalist ruling class in every country.

An important expression of this perspective was reflected in the passing of a resolution calling for the immediate release and dropping of all charges against Bogdan Syrotiuk.

Syrotiuk, a 27-year-old socialist and leader of the Trotskyist Young Guard of Bolshevik-Leninists, was sentenced earlier this month by a Ukrainian district court to 15 years in prison on bogus charges of "high treason under martial law."

Bogdan's only "crime" was writing articles published on the *World Socialist Web Site* exposing the official rehabilitation of collaborators with Hitler's Nazis during World War II and the Zelensky regime's escalating attacks on democratic rights.

While explicitly condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Bogan's articles insisted that the war could only be ended through the unity of Ukrainian and Russian workers against the oligarchs in both countries. The court deemed his writings "socially dangerous" and ordered the destruction of all his socialist literature. The 15-year sentencing of Syrotiuk is an attempt to intimidate and silence growing domestic opposition to the bloody conflict. The meeting passed a resolution condemning the sentence and demanding Syrotiuk's immediate and unconditional freedom.

It concluded with an appeal to all attendees to contact the party about forming rank-and-file committees to fight the assault on the NDIS and other vital social programs, and to apply to join the SEP.



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