

Meeting attendees denounce Australian government's assault on the disabled

Our reporters
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An online public meeting on Sunday by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), the Committee for Public Education (CFPE), and the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) brought together more than 130 participants to coordinate opposition to the Albanese Labor government's brutal cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Following the meeting, *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with several attendees who voiced their outrage over the cuts, expressed solidarity with the fight for rank-and-file committees, and highlighted the connections between the attacks at home and the bipartisan drive to war abroad.

John, a retired teacher from Adelaide, South Australia, said the destruction of the NDIS was part of an assault by capitalism on social programs internationally.

"The US is a good example of privatisation gone wrong," he said. "The same thing is happening in education. Young people are being pushed into spheres that are more profitable, and the students who want to do things like art are punished."

The removal of disability support will inevitably lead to deaths, he warned, expressing shock that such measures are unfolding in the 21st century: "We don't normally see these things happening in real time. Historically, you learn in school about what the Nazis did to the disabled, but we are not trained to see these things when they are happening before our eyes."

Voicing deep concern over the promotion of nationalist and xenophobic sentiment in preparation for world war, John added: "The media constantly whips up anti-Muslim and anti-Chinese sentiment in the service of the people pulling the strings who stand to profit from war."

When WSWs reporters pointed out that the only way to halt the descent into world war is to build an international socialist movement in the working class, he replied: "I agree 100 percent."

In central Queensland, **Laura**, whose son's NDIS support was slashed by 60 percent in February, said the meeting was "eye-opening, especially what was said about the international situation." She described Labor's gutting of the NDIS as a complete "betrayal," adding: "I will never vote Labor again, no matter what."

Laura emphasised that building rank-and-file committees was essential: "Rank-and-file organisation has been completely watered down by the trade union movement. They get told by political parties and big business what to do, and they bow down to

that.

"Rank-and-file committees can give power back to the people. The ordinary working people, who make up the vast majority of society, need to have the decisive weight in all decision-making."

Kim, a retired high school teacher living in Brisbane, stated: "The massive increase in government expenditure on militarisation is a real concern. Clearly, the first areas to suffer are in the social services, especially related to early interventions in education and health. Our increasingly capitalised defence system is the beneficiary as the taxpayer now fuels a war economy. The meeting made that point clear.

"I empathise deeply with teachers, health workers, and those members of society who have special needs. There is also the reduction of services at my end of the age spectrum, even for the most basic in-home care.

"Eligibility is now based on selected and carefully filtered information crunched by an algorithm, with minimal human input and automated feedback to applicants. The process is clearly designed to reduce government expenditure on in-home care, a vital social service.

"It is heartening to see the growing pushback from the rank and file, distancing themselves from bureaucratic unionism and building the ongoing resistance of workers against profiteering business and government leaders."

Adolfo, a care worker in Brisbane, explained that Sunday's meeting provided "a lot of information that people don't know. It showed that the NDIS cuts will affect a lot of people in need, as well as workers in the industry, the schools, and the hospitals."

Many care workers are casuals or on temporary contracts, which means they now face immediate job losses and reduced hours, he noted.

Adolfo insisted that resources should be directed to social services rather than militarism: "War suits the ruling class, but it is no good for us. We are paying the price for war through inflation, especially the rising cost of fuel and food. The government is making China a scapegoat to prepare for war."

Josh, a care worker from Newcastle, highlighted the severe impact the NDIS cuts are already having on carers and public hospital emergency rooms: "There's been blowback on all of this onto carers as well, because we are now dealing with behavioural issues to the extent of serious injuries and assaults.

"Clients who up until a couple of months ago had access to specialists and better connections to healthcare are now being

funnelled into the mainstream sector, which is already beyond capacity. Hospitals in Newcastle already have an average wait time of eight hours. They're putting more stress on an already broken system."

Josh condemned the official propaganda surrounding the scheme: "The government is putting the blame onto the 'cheaters' of the scheme and making everyone pay for it. This will be another Robodebt with a new name. People will die. People will suffer, but money will be saved, so on the government's end it looks positive on the balance sheet.

"We have people high up who have never experienced a life of disability making arbitrary choices for the lives of people who cannot have their say."

A **South Australian cardiology nurse** stated that teachers would "undoubtedly be impacted by the NDIS cuts. The 'Thriving Kids' rollout is being rushed and is totally incapable of managing the demand of kids and families in need of assistance. It's also ridiculous to make people living with disabilities jump through endless bureaucratic hoops to prove their 'disabledness.'

"This is reminiscent of the horrific private health insurance companies in America, which deny people access to healthcare even when an adequate diagnosis and medical treatment plan—including for serious heart conditions—have been recommended by practitioners.

"It shows how inappropriately these private entities manage things in a reactive, 'adverse event' manner, rather than a preventative one," she explained. "In terms of disability, if supports are identified earlier and put in place, it improves overall outcomes for the person. Restricting access causes severe delays in assistance and care, leading directly to worse long-term outcomes. It is typical of the government's short-term, reactive approach—which is the current healthcare system in a nutshell.

"Early identification and intervention for people with disabilities is evidence-based and increases independence. Instead, we're likely to have a generation of kids who aren't getting the support they need, which will permanently undermine their overall health, social life and education participation, further disadvantaging them."

Jenny, a traffic warden from Melbourne, attended the meeting because she has an autistic grandson. "I feel very strongly about the NDIS," she said. "These cuts are disastrous and will make it very hard for people to cope. It will affect my family directly. We need as much help as we can get.

"My grandson was diagnosed a long time ago as category-three. Because he was deaf, he had to get grommets and go through extensive speech pathology. Without that, he wouldn't be talking as well. It used to affect him greatly because he couldn't communicate with other children and was left isolated."

Jenny explained how NDIS support transformed his life: "Now he has dedicated funding in the classroom, with individual hours allocated to him, which has improved his handwriting 100 percent. He attends Yellow Door, a community care network that helps him socialise through activities and games. He has an occupational therapist who visits on Mondays, and he attends music therapy, which has been wonderful for him."

These essential programs fall under "social and community

participation," one of the primary targets for elimination under the government's new framework. "If he steps backwards, that burden will simply be thrown back onto the schools and hospitals," Jenny said. "Teachers already have huge class sizes to deal with, so a child like him is treated as a disruption."

Jenny remarked that Sue Phillips' report on the schools resonated with her: "She explained clearly what will happen inside classrooms. I understand even more now why Victorian teachers have been striking. My brother and sister were teachers, so I know the immense anxiety and workload stress in schools.

"The idea that the government will use 'functional capacity' tests to claim that if a child can go to the toilet or shower themselves they don't need support is appalling. It really got to me."

Maureen, from Ballarat, who worked as an aged care nurse before spending 30 years in housing and homelessness services, said the meeting gave her a perspective completely absent from corporate media coverage:

"I didn't realise that there is such a deep correlation between the funding cuts to the NDIS and the increased billions pouring into the military for the drive to conflict with China. The meeting pulled together the issues in a way that clarified what is really going on.

"It is frightening, but one of the speakers made the point that we need a revolution, and I want to be part of that. Developing rank-and-file committees is the way forward. We can no longer ignore these issues and hope they go away. The cuts will hit clients, support workers, teachers, and healthcare staff alike. It is clear this is an international offensive against the working class."

Noran, a dental student originally from Egypt and now living in Melbourne, attended because several of her friends rely on disability supports.

"I imagine these cuts will impact heavily on schools, which are already frantic," she said. "A single teacher often has hundreds of assessments to mark, which is completely unmanageable for one person.

"The SEP is focusing on these discussions in a clear, principled way that helps clarify the real issues. Max Boddy explained clearly that the funds stripped from the NDIS are being redirected toward the military machine. That is the crux of the issue: Society's resources must be directed to human needs, not imperialist war."



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