

Communist Party of Australia

Central Committee

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The COVID-19 Pandemic

Covid-19 is spreading throughout much of the world, largely as a consequence of the failure of capitalism to solve any crisis. The Communist Party of Australia recognises the significant contribution made by health workers at the frontline of this developing pandemic and stands in solidarity with them, along with working class victims, denied their basic human rights, and all people fighting for universal access to life's needs.

Whilst the structural contradictions of capitalism require revolutionary transformation of society into one of ensuring the health and safety of the global population, it is necessary to combat this current crisis in ways immediately available to us. Governments across Australia have been too slow to act, relying on market forces, including manipulating the stock market to stop the haemorrhaging of the economy, instead of investing to stop the health impacts of the latest pandemic.

Reforming those aspects of the health care sector driven by the profit motive. Immediate steps can be made to eliminate the waste, speculation and commodification of private health care through the nationalisation of the entire sector. Health care is a right and the Communist Party calls upon parliament to legislate universal access to all our medical requirements.

Meanwhile, the economic impact of the virus is already hitting Australian workers and communities.

We can benefit from the experience of China in dealing with the Coronavirus involving drastic social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus. This has shown to be an effective approach with the number of new cases reducing daily. It would be wise to look to their model and consult them for advice.

The duty of the government in this scenario is three-fold: protection of the people from the COVID-19 virus, responsibility for providing the necessary treatment for those who are hit by the virus and protection of the people from the economic impact of the virus.

We strongly believe that a 2-week shut down must be implemented now alongside the following:

1. Governments, State and Federal must implement a sound containment policy. The health and safety of the people must be the top priority in implementing such a policy, especially those most vulnerable. Ensuring hoarding of essential items, price gouging and other deliberate profiteering must be minimised to the extent possible through legislative change. Continuously rewarding greed must be abolished now.
2. The government must ensure a public educational outreach about the disease using electronic and print media to subdue the current confusion that has come with the panic and media overload.
3. Unions must be at the forefront of working-class responses to this latest failure and crisis. It is essential that workers at the frontline such as health care workers be involved in the decision-making processes through their unions. Legislating for workers ability to strike against unfair employer practices during this period is essential to minimising abuses, exploitation and further employment insecurity and attacks on wages and conditions. Workers must not pay for capitalisms crises.
4. Many people are already feeling the brunt of the pandemic losing jobs or having their hours reduced resulting in lost income. We demand the government abolish waiting periods for unemployment benefits. We support the demand for an increase of \$95 to Newstart as an immediate measure to reduce the pain experienced by working class people. We demand that no worker is disadvantaged as a consequence of this crisis made worse by government inaction.

5. The CPA endorses the ACTU demand for special paid leave for all workers in case of quarantine or lock down, including casual and labour hire workers. The government's stimulus package with a one-off payment to welfare recipients falls short of the assistance required, and does nothing but provide a band-aid instead of meaningful distribution of wealth protecting the vulnerable and minimising community
6. Governments must also ensure people are not forced into homelessness through an inability to pay mortgages or rent. Banks must be forced to suspend mortgage/rent payments. Emergency housing must become a top government priority, programs such as these will not only ensure a persons' right to housing, but also significantly increase employment and affordable housing.
7. Testing and treatment of the virus must be universally accessible and free. Governments need to redirect funds towards health care centres and hospitals as a top priority. Bulk-billing by doctors and pathologists should be compulsory and the government must temporarily convert private hospitals for public use as long as the crisis lasts.
8. Employers and in this instance the government are required to provide a healthy and safe workplace. Workers and workplace health and safety is a crucial issue that workers need to be consulted about and new protections put in place to protect workers and the public. This is a key industrial issue across all industries. This requires the immediate developed new safety practices, supply of resources and workers compensation recognition.
9. The Australian government also has a global role. Currently there are countries under sanctions limiting access to medical supplies, including Cuba, Syria, Iran, Venezuela, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). In light of the global pandemic Australia must play its role to end these criminal blockades and allow these countries to import the much-needed supplies.
10. We salute the efforts and solidarity of Cuban, Chinese and Venezuelan doctors and other health professionals who despite the US economic sanctions are working in Italy helping the people with care and medicines such as Cuba's *Interferon 2b* to overcome the current pandemic.

The government appears to have no logistical planning in place to develop the capacity required to deal with the crisis confronting the health system in Australia. Without the critical planning for emergency beds, staffing, face masks and respirators in place to treat the potentially thousands of critically ill patients' we risk having to make choices like in Italy as to who will live or die. Who will confront the panic and guarantee supplies and support to people in the community stranded and isolated when sent home without an income?

The Communist Party of Australia will work with all organisations seeking to ensure that the working class does not pay for the crises being inflicted upon us all as a result of capitalist exploitation of the people and nature to secure riches for the ruling class. We will work with all organisations nationally and internationally who will defend universal access to life's needs including best available health care to protect us against these escalating global crises.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!

Communist Party of Australia, CPA
Central Committee
16th March 2020