

Transition to disaster

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

1 September 2021

The National Plan to Transition Australia's National COVID-19 Response is a plan for disaster. The Federal Government, at the behest of the most powerful capitalists in Australia, is planning to give up the fight to eliminate COVID19 and even to re-introduce it into areas of Australia that are now free. It airily dismisses concerns by referring to the research of the respected Doherty Institute.

The National Plan is a single sheet of paper that sets out a four step process. We're no experts, but most points in Phases A and B appear to be a bureaucratic expression of the current framework. The really dangerous part is the final "Post-Vaccination" Phase D, where the proposal is to abandon all internal social distancing regulations and start "living with the virus".

The transition markers in the National Plan are reached when 70% and 80% of the population over the age of 16 are vaccinated. This equates to 56% and 64% of the total population vaccinated, a very long way below what is necessary to achieve herd immunity, especially with the Delta variant dominant. In these circumstances, a little elementary logic shows that abandoning social distancing will lead to mass infection and death. Certainly deaths will be much fewer than if no vaccines were available, but that doesn't make the plan in any way acceptable.

It is the reference to the Doherty Institute research that allows the Government to get away with a proposal that the lay reader can see is dangerous. The Doherty research hasn't been well circulated, though, because if it was widely read there would be uproar. Fortunately, the MACG has been able to find a valuable analysis by Matt Barrie at: medium.com.

In summary, the Doherty Institute predicts mass hospitalisations and ICU demand that is double current ICU capacity. The consequences in death and serious disability should be obvious. And, what's worse, the major difference that would be achieved by the desired 80% vaccination rate would be a delaying of the curve, as infections take longer to get hold in the community. The Doherty graphs, which cut off at 180 days after the transition to Phase B (where public health measures start to be relaxed at 70% adult vaccination), show cases continuing to rise at that point. This is not a path to freedom from COVID-19. It's a transition to disaster.

So, what's going on? The capitalist class in Australia wants to get back into the world economy. Certainly, mineral exports have been going gangbusters all along, but tourism and education, two huge export industries, have been closed down for over a year and the businesses in that sector are desperate to get going again. Capital also wants access to temporary migrant workers to be restored. Because their temporary status puts them at the mercy of employers, they are often

employed at illegally low wage rates. Farmers and other bosses who make major use of this scam have been complaining bitterly about labour shortages.

The success of public health authorities in suppressing COVID-19 and then eliminating it from internal circulation (apart from periodic breaches in hotel quarantine) has produced a major problem for capital. Keeping COVID-19 out of the community has been greatly welcomed, but has led to the population being reluctant to rejoin the global economy while the virus is rampant overseas. Business has therefore had to pressure its political representatives to come up with a solution.

The National Plan is that solution and the current outbreak in New South Wales is the wedge which the Federal Government is using to make it look inevitable. Unlikely as it might sound, Scott Morrison and Gladys Berejiklian don't want to stop this wave. They just want it to move slowly, while the vaccination campaign is implemented.

The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group calls on the labour movement in Australia to reject the National Plan to Transition — Australia's National COVID-19 Response and instead to fight for the following program:

- Maintaining the objective of eliminating COVID-19 from the community;
- Free, safe vaccines for all, regardless of intellectual property;
- Adequate, tailored health information for all, communicated by people trusted by target communities in languages that will be understood;
- Adequately staffed and funded public health teams for testing and contact tracing;
- Purpose built quarantine facilities, appropriately staffed and capable of dealing with the required demand;
- A living income paid to all who need to isolate away from their employment on public health grounds;
- Cancellation of residential rent and mortgage interest for the duration of the pandemic.

Vaccination must not be used as a tool for creating a capitalist dystopia where we must "live with" the virus. Instead, vaccination must be part of a coherent strategy to help eliminate it. It can be done. It must be done. We have to fight.

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