

**Who are we ?**

● The International Workers Committee Against War, Exploitation, for a Workers' International (IWC) was set up at the World Conference held in Mumbai ( India ) on November 19, 20, 21, 2016 gathering delegates from 28 countries.

● The IWC was set up on the basis of the Mumbai Manifesto against war, exploitation and precarious labour which was endorsed by labour activist and trade union and political organisations officers from 46 countries (\*)

● Its continuations committee is composed of labour activists from all political/ trade union backgrounds:  
**Innocent Assogba** (Benin),  
**Alan Benjamin** (USA),  
**Colia Clark** (USA),  
**Constantin Cretan** (Romania),  
**Berthony Dupont** (Haiti),  
**Ney Ferreira** (Brazil),  
**Daniel Gluckstein** (France),  
**Rubina Jamil** (Pakistan),  
**Apo Leung** (China),  
**M.A. Patil** (India),  
**Mandlenkosi Phangwa** (Azania),  
**Sergio Pineda** (Mexico),  
**Klaus Schüller** (Germany),  
**Jung Sikhwa** (Korea),  
**John Sweeney** (Great Britain),  
**Mark Vassilev** (Russia),  
**Nambiath Vasudevan** (India).

(\*) Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Azania, Belarus, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Ecuador, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Korea, Mali, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

The International Workers' Committee Against War and Exploitation, for the Workers' International, has proposed to conduct an international working class fact finding survey. This will enable the collecting of the facts that accuse the bankrupt capitalist regime, and will be a call to fight for the independence of the workers' movement, to put an end to the society of exploitation.

The results of this survey will provide the material for the preparation of the second international conference against war and exploitation, for a workers' international (which will be held, in application of our commitments, when conditions for traveling and meeting have returned to normal).

In order to facilitate the circulation of documents (in English, French and Spanish) among the organizations, groups and activists of all tendencies from the 53 countries that have called for the conference, we kindly ask you to limit your contributions to 10,000 - 20,000 characters (2,000 to 4,000 words).

The 8 questions that make up this survey were published in newsletter n° 164 and are available upon request.

Already published:

- 1- Pakistan. Author: All-Pakistan Trade Union Federation (APTUF) - Date: October 5th
- 2- Canada. Author: Activists involved in IWC campaigns - Date: October 12<sup>th</sup>

**Report n° 3  
AUSTRALIA**

**Author : Australia Asia Worker Links – Date: November 2020**

**1) What have the consequences of the health crisis for the population been – especially for the working class? What has the Covid impact been on employment, how many jobs have been lost?**

Australia, being an island, was able to shut its borders totally before the virus was able to take hold internally.

As of late October, there were almost 28,000 Covid-19 infections recorded in Australia, with just over 900 deaths.

The State of Victoria has been the worst affected with just over 20,000 infections and around 820 deaths.

Most of the deaths have been of people over 60 years of age.

The major outbreaks have affected the aged care sector, plagued by cost cutting and insecure work, and those working in the hospitality sector and health care.

The former due to the insecure nature of their employment, the latter due to their constant exposure of the virus from patients.

The first impacts were felt in the travel, tourist and international student sectors as borders, as well as internal travel between states, was either blocked or severely curtailed.

This affected hundreds of thousands of workers.

Lockdowns have varied across Australia but their effect has been most noticeable in the hos-

pitality and retail sectors.

Hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost.

**2) Are there any figures available concerning the lives lost of workers in general and particularly front-line workers, including doctors and other hospital staff?**

In Victoria, around 3,600 health care workers contracted the virus, of which around 80% of these were due to workplace exposure. Less than 5 of the workers who were infected died.

The rate of infection for health workers in other states is be slightly lower due to less pressure on health workers as numbers were lower and PPE and OHS could be safeguarded better.

The meat industry was badly affected. More than 1,000 abattoir workers caught Coronavirus. Several workers died. The industry is still under government restrictions mandating limited staffing. Tens of thousands of workers have lost work time and pay. There is compulsory testing of all meat workers regularly. Workers who test positive or have to quarantine have to use their own entitlements.

**3) What measures were taken or not taken by the government to cope with the pandemic? Were any wage deductions imposed by the bosses and governments?**

The various Federal and State government imposed a series of border closures, quarantining and lockdown measures that have varied over time.

The governments instituted various additional welfare payments to workers who were laid off, to small companies who had lost business and after pressure, some government provided paid sick leave to workers who needed to quarantine but had no sick leave available to them.

These emergency payments, including a temporary halt to house evictions, house debt repayments and insolvency requirements for business, cushioned the economic crisis for many people for the first six months of the pandemic. Some of these measures are now being withdrawn and the economic impact on workers is being felt.

At the same time, large segments of the economy, like travel, were left without aid, while groups like international students and temporary migrant workers were given no support. Casual workers who did not have long term employment with a company were left with no support. There were mass sackings in many industries including airlines, media and universities, with tens of thousands of workers losing their jobs. Many thousands of workers from these groups have been forced to rely on charities in order to survive.

**4) What new attacks against workers' rights and democracy were launched by the bosses and governments during this year, as they took advantage of the pandemic?**

The government has held workshops among business and unions, and they have streamlined the process to change work contracts, to give very little time for workers to respond to variations. Many believe that laws to further undercut conditions will be rolled out soon. There was a lot of pressure on workers who were bargaining for new contracts during this time. Wage increases have been very small as workers have found hard to organise and bargain during a pandemic. In Australia strikes, pickets and most forms of industrial actions including workplace meetings, union meetings and issuing union solidarity statements are severely restricted with very heavy penalties. During the pandemic the right to organise and to demonstrate was severely restricted, with the use of police, riot police and army patrols used to stop rallies and to intimidate or arrest protest organisers, both from the right and the left.

**5) For years, the number of workers in the informal sector has continued to increase. The fight against precarious labour must lead the labour movement to think about organizing these workers. The workers in the informal sector have paid a heavy price in the healthcare crisis. What has their situation been since March 2020? What reactions has this triggered?**

In Australia as well, it has been insecure workers in the aged care, security and hospitality that have paid the highest price in terms of health and monetary costs.

In addition, many temporary visa workers have also been left exposed as they have lost their jobs and find themselves in even more precarious situation.

There has been lots of discussion and publicity about how insecure work arrangements have contributed to the spread of the virus. While there is much more awareness of this issue, no concrete steps have been taken to address this.

**6) Women workers have also been particularly hit. They are the first to lose their jobs, the last to be taken back at their work places when they reopen. They have to take in charge their children deprived of schooling. Domestic violence has increased with the lockdown. What form has it taken? What mobilisations have taken place to defend the rights of working women?**

In Australia as well as the rest of the world, many of the worst hit workers were women, either through exposure to the virus or greater workloads due to working in so called caring professions. Many women were employed in the travel and hospitality sectors.

While research has shown that men took more of a role of domestic duties during lockdown, especially with children at home, the overwhelming majority of the work was still done by women. Thus, for many women workers, working at home and lockdown increased their workload. Domestic violence is still an increasing issue. Governments have given some extra funding to family services, but the demand has put incredible pressure on services. Many organisations are struggling to cope with the demand.

Not major mobilisation has happened.

**7) With the new technologies, the capitalists dismantle labour relations, restructure companies and destroy jobs. What are the consequences and what are the threats to labour relations in the coming period?**

Some companies have announced that they will speed up automation plans.

The lockdown has forced many workers to work at home, and employers are now looking at this as a future strategy. This will allow employers to shift the costs of running an office to the workers themselves.

In addition, by removing workers from a common environment, it will further atomise the working class making them more liable to exploitation and harder to organise by unions.

Delivery of goods, groceries and meals to homes has had a huge increase in this period. The great majority of this workforce is precarious and in insecure employment.

**8) What were the positions of workers' organisations and their leaderships during that period? What were the demands? What was their attitude towards the plans designed by the bosses and the governments?**

The major demands by unions have been for OHS measures especially around PPE, workload and safe workplaces.

They have also called for better welfare payments for workers who have lost their job.

The majority of unions have curtailed most industrial action activities due to laws preventing protests and the congregation of people together.

Unions have held conferences and meetings to develop strategies to fight against Covid-19 infection danger in the workplace, against the new conditions created by working at home, and against the increase in insecurity, poverty and unemployment. However there have been few solidarity actions to support the workers in the industries that have been worse affected, and the workers that were left out of support plans. There have been union proposals on how support should be better organised and how industry should be restructured, but Australian unions have organised only limited campaigns to confront capitalist and government attacks during the economic and social emergency of 2020. ■