

**WOMEN WORKERS' ANSWER  
TO COVID**



**CAPITALISM  
CAUSED THE CRISIS,  
WORKERS CAN  
SOLVE IT!**

**Statement of demands initiated by Radical Women**

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# Introduction

COVID has exposed the far-reaching inequalities of the profit system. Women, who experience every form of inequality as well as their unique oppression as a gender, have borne the brunt of this pandemic. Horrific statistics provided by the United Workers Union, showing COVID's impact on the hospitality industry, would be similar in all highly casualised sectors. This predominantly female workforce is 80% casual.

- 85% of these workers either had their shifts cut or lost their jobs,
- nearly 50% did not have enough savings to cover a month's basic expenses,
- 32% couldn't keep up with their bills,
- 20% went without essentials and 12% relied on a food bank or charity.

— United Workers Union, *Hostility to insecure work spikes among hospo workers after Covid*, 1 November 2020

We should add the cost of childcare (Australia's is the fourth most expensive in the world), women's other caring responsibilities and the insecurity of non-citizenship. Ninety-one percent were worried about their mental health.

COVID has also revealed a system incapable of dealing with the crisis. This pandemic, like no other, has thrown its commodity chains and intricate operations into total disarray. And if capital can't grow, it can't survive. COVID has demonstrated that those who grow rich off the system will stop at nothing to squeeze profit from both human labour and the natural world it plunders.

What we have experienced in Australia since March 2020 mirrors the rest of the world:

- Across industries, from factories to universities, hundreds of thousands of workers have lost their incomes — at least 55%<sup>1</sup> of jobs lost under COVID are women's, but it's likely more. Those still in jobs struggle to cope with stressful workloads and worsened conditions.
- State and federal governments serve the needs of business, ignoring workers and our communities:
  - Public health suffers from years of privatisation, outsourcing and underfunding, and Victoria's funding is abysmal: in 2018/19, for example, \$0.6 billion compared to \$1.6 billion in NSW and \$2.3 billion in Queensland;

- Aged care, where exposure has been high and ¾ of cases and deaths have occurred, is big business. An example is Mable Technologies, closely linked to the Liberal Party and contracted by the Morrison government for nearly \$6 million to provide emergency staff for COVID-affected facilities — which it failed to do;<sup>2</sup>
  - Government benefits, like Jobseeker and free childcare, were brought in to keep businesses afloat, and only for as long as needed. For the workers and communities relying on them, these benefits have been “snapped back” or wound down.
- COVID has unmasked the anti-social nature of an economy based on profit, not community needs — such as:
    - The reluctance of businesses to provide adequate PPE equipment for their workers and customers or follow mandated health measures;
    - Victoria's hotel quarantine scandal, where staff was recruited through labour hire, using private security companies and providing no training.

Public money has bailed out corporates in distress, such as Qantas and Virgin (which then cut their workforces), and funded more policing. In contrast, the health system strains under the weight of the crisis.

Capitalism created the conditions for this disease, which is passed from animals to humans. In its constant hunt for profit, this marauding system has hacked through the natural world, destroying the earth's protective ecosystems, ruining habitats and throwing the climate off balance. Unless we stop the systemic theft and destruction, more deadly pandemics will follow and exploitation will become even more intense.

These demands address some urgent solutions needed now, which are achievable through unified grassroots organising in our unions and communities. While not exhaustive, they assert our collective rights as workers who run the industries and people who make up this society.

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<sup>2</sup> David Hardaker, “Revealed: the Liberal, Murdoch networks making millions delivering ‘Uber for aged care,’” *Crikey*, 24 September 2020

<sup>1</sup> Gender Equity Victoria, *Gender Equity & COVID-19 factsheet*

# Demands

**(1) A reduced working week with no reduction in pay; all jobs to be permanent and ongoing with full entitlements; workers to be provided free, quality training, funded by industry, in order to increase and better distribute employment.**

What it would look like:

- Job positions, which are now casual, labour hire and other forms of insecure employment, would become secure, ongoing and flexible according to workers' needs and with full entitlements. The working week would be shortened at no reduction in pay, such as 30 hours at 40 hours pay.
- Workers are already paid a fraction of what they produce (the rest goes to profit). By making rich corporations pay tax based on their profit, a pool of these funds would enable small employers to comply.

Benefits:

- There is no shortage of work: reduced hours at no loss of pay would create more jobs and spread out the work; no part of the workforce would be jobless or underemployed while another is overworked.
- This will end casualisation, which is employers' method of cheapening the cost of labour and keeping a pool of labour on demand.
- Life will no longer be taken over by work: workers' time will be freed up for personal pursuits, such as recreation, rest, socialising, studying; participating in the community and movements; taking care of their physical and mental health. This better quality of life would benefit the whole of society.

Workers face job losses or drastic cuts in hours, while others are worked to breaking point.



International examples:

- Unionists in the United States are calling for a 30-hour week at 40 hours' pay.
- Finland's government is calling for a 6-hour working day at 8 hours' pay and a 4-day workweek.

**(2) A guaranteed liveable income for all**

Note: It is predicted that technology will put approximately 50% of the workforce out of a job in the next 20 years. Work conscription in the form of "bullshit jobs" — unpleasant, unsafe, unpaid or low-paid, on-demand and temporary — will escalate to keep people off welfare and providing super-cheap labor.

What it would look like:

It would be

- based on the cost of living — food, clothing, quality housing, entertainment and (until made free) education, health, transport and care — to enable everyone to live comfortably and securely;
- regularly indexed to keep up with the cost of living, such as every 6 months;
- enshrined as an inalienable right, not at the discretion of state powers, and would free recipients from coercive "mutual obligations," such as evidence of job searching, taking a job not of one's choice or working unpaid;
- available to everyone, irrespective of personal assets, age, citizenship or visa status and marital/relationship status.

Benefits:

- Everyone will enjoy a secure, comfortable standard of living.
- It would free everyone from coercion, state intrusion and judgement.
- People would no longer be forced to work in jobs inappropriate to their situation, such as unsuitable working hours or requiring hours of travel.



### (3) *Nationalise essential industries, to be controlled by those working in the industry and communities who rely on it*

What it would look like:

- Nationalised industries are brought under control of the state, without compensation to the private owners.
- All industries are open to being nationalised, but all essential industries must be nationalised now, such as education (Including early childhood education and care), aged care, healthcare and pharmaceutical, energy, transport, banking.
- For this to be achieved, nationalised industries must be brought under the control of the workers, who run these industries, in collaboration with the communities, who rely on them:
  - Management and control could be done through councils representing workers, consumers and the communities they serve.
  - For these bodies to be truly representative, they would be elected and run democratically; workers and communities in collaboration would make decisions on all aspects of the operation, production and distribution of services and goods.

Benefits:

- Workers already have the expertise of running industries, but profiteers have control.
- The industry would socially run in the interest of society, according to people's needs; production would therefore be more efficient, because it would be centrally organised to meet these needs — open, accountable cooperation would replace competition and secrecy.
- Services such as energy or childcare could be made free or affordable, therefore available to everyone.
- In worker-controlled industries, competitive

exploitation and discrimination would have no place: sexism, racism and able-ism, which profit feeds on, would become counter-productive and not tolerated; those most exploited and discriminated against — women, immigrants, people of color, LGBTIQ+, disabled people and young workers — would enjoy equal pay for work of comparable skills and excellent conditions.

- This would set the ground for addressing the climate crisis and the never-ending encroachment of industry, like forestry and mining, onto First Nations lands and into workers' communities.

International examples:

- In the early 2000s, Venezuela and Argentina have examples of workers taking control of industries that were failing or abandoned. But without taking over the state, these promising examples didn't last.

*If we don't do this, the alternative is the system-caused destruction and uncertain future we now face. We can't afford not to!*



If critical industries were nationalised and run by the workers and community, they would be top quality and free, serving people's needs, not profit's interests. Photos: (top) Honi Soit (bottom) Australian Nursing & Midwifery Federation.

**(4) Tax large corporations in proportion to their profits; and make them pay**

Note: In 2018-2019, individual income taxes contributed 41% to overall tax revenue, and company tax contributed only 19.1%. According to the Australian Tax Office, one-third of large corporations pay no tax.

What this would look like:

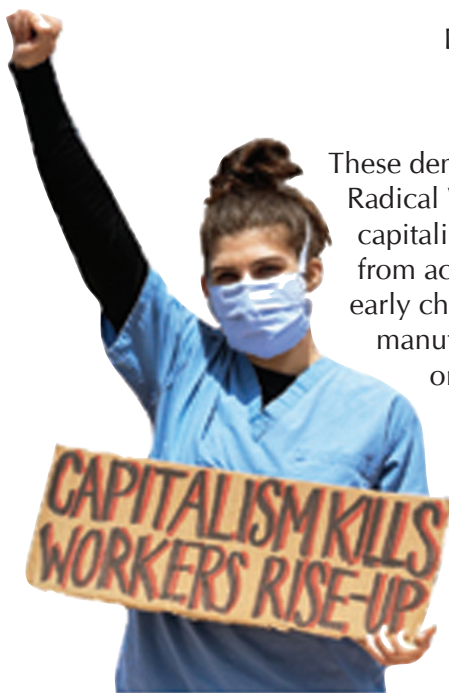
- Rich corporations would pay the taxes they owe!
- Corporate welfare, paid by workers' taxes, would stop.

Benefits:

- It would provide a massive tax base, capable of financing all that the majority desperately need: free, top quality education, health, childcare, aged care, transport, public housing, and a safe environment, ending the risk of future pandemics and natural disasters.



December 2020



These demands came out of a series of zoom brainstorming sessions initiated by Radical Women. The fortnightly conversations, known as “COVID, capitalism and how to fix this mess,” brought together workers from across a range of industries — including retail and hospitality, early childhood and higher education, public sector services and manufacturing — to develop the ideas and produce materials for organising in unions, communities and other grassroots networks.

**Contact Radical Women for more information, or to get involved!**

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**Looking for a place where you  
can make a difference?**

**Join Radical Women!**

RW is a trailblazing socialist feminist organisation. It's the revolutionary wing of the women's movement and a strong feminist voice within the Left. Immersed in the daily fight against racism, sexism and transphobia, homophobia and labour exploitation, Radical Women views women's leadership as decisive to global change.

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