

Tens of thousands attend climate change rallies in Australia

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Tens of thousands participated in “People’s Climate Marches” in major cities, along with regional and rural centres, around Australia last weekend.

Called in the lead-up to the United Nation’s Paris climate summit this week, the rallies were part of a series held in an estimated 600 cities and 125 countries around the world. Large demonstrations took place in London, Madrid and elsewhere in Europe, along with protests in Latin America, Canada and Asia. In Paris, authorities used the “state of emergency” laws imposed after last month’s terrorist attack to crack down on climate change protests.

While the demonstrations expressed the growing concern among ordinary people over climate change and environmental destruction, they were politically dominated by organisations that promote the illusion that nationally-based, capitalist governments can resolve the crisis, and that the political leaders gathered at the Paris summit can be pressured to “take action.”

According to organisers, some 45,000 people attended the event in Sydney on Sunday, while as many as 60,000 participated in the Melbourne protest on Friday evening. Another 6,000 demonstrated in both Canberra and Perth, about 5,000 in both Adelaide and Brisbane and 1,500 in Hobart.

The protests took place in the wake of a series of bushfires in Australia that destroyed hundreds of thousands of hectares of land, and claimed seven lives. Climate change is thought to be contributing to longer periods of dry, hot weather that are conducive to fires, extending Australia’s bush fire season beyond the traditional summer months.

Significant protests took place elsewhere in the Asia Pacific region. In New Zealand, some 15,000 attended the protest in Auckland, with another 8,000 in Christchurch and 7,000 in Wellington. Around 1,000

people rallied in Tokyo, 5,000 in Dhaka and 15,000 in Manila. Other rallies were reported, including in the Pacific countries of Tuvalu, Fiji, Kiribati and the Marshall Islands, all of which confront rising sea levels as a result of climate change.

The Sydney protest was promoted by a variety of environmental organisations, community and ethnic associations, along with trade unions. Those marching carried signs bearing slogans such as, “Coal is bad for humanity, solar and wind=future,” “Stand up for the Pacific” and “Climate justice, people power.”

Others, reflecting the political orientation of the protest organisers, held placards appealing to Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, such as “Come on Malcolm, show us your Green side!” and “Mr Turnbull are you listening?”

Turnbull was installed as prime minister in a backroom coup in September, aimed at fashioning a government capable of carrying out the sweeping austerity measures demanded by big business. He previously postured as a figure concerned about climate change in a bid to broaden the conservative Liberal Party’s base of support.

In Sydney, the main speakers were Climate Council member Tim Flannery and Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore, rather than representatives of the major political parties. Flannery, echoing the promotional material issued by the rally organisers, appealed to Turnbull: “Do your utmost to see success at Paris, we won’t accept anything less.”

In reality, the Paris talks are a political charade that will do nothing to address mounting global greenhouse emissions. Even before the official talks began, representatives of a number of governments made clear that they would not commit to any internationally binding emissions reduction targets.

Instead, each country will set its own targets. Both the Obama administration and the Australian government have reportedly indicated that while they are attending the talks, they will not be negotiating emissions reductions.

The move follows the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen talks to establish any binding, short-term targets, amid bitter divisions, particularly between the US and other major powers, on the one hand, and so-called developing countries, including China and India. Subsequent talks held under the auspices of the UN, including in Cancun, Mexico in 2010, and New York last year, did nothing to establish binding targets.

At the Sydney rally, Reece Proudfoot, an organiser of the event and a World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) representative, told the *Sydney Morning Herald*: “Next year is an election year, and we’re sending a message that people who care about the climate are a strong and growing force.”

Both Labor and the Greens, seeking to capitalise on the widespread concern over climate change, mobilised contingents of supporters. Labor leader Bill Shorten and Greens leader Richard Di Natale attended the rally in Melbourne, while Tanya Plibersek, deputy Labor leader, was present at the Sydney event.

On the day of the Melbourne rally, Shorten unveiled new Labor Party targets of a 45 percent reduction in Australia’s carbon emissions by 2030, on 2005 levels. Underscoring the fact that the move is little more than electoral posturing, Shorten stressed that the figure was merely a “proposal” and “the basis for our consultations with industry, employers, unions and the community.”

Turnbull dismissed the target as unrealistic. Based on some scientific modelling, however, if past emissions were taken into account, Australia would need to reduce its emissions by 64 percent by 2030 if it were to align with calls to limit climate change to 2 degrees centigrade.

Both Labor and the Greens are seeking to cover up their record, including the establishment of a pro-business “carbon tax” by the previous Greens-backed Labor government, which saw real emissions continue to rise, and handed major subsidies to big business, including coal producers. The tax was meant to be the first step toward an emissions trading scheme, modelled on similar initiatives in Europe, that have

done nothing to address the environmental crisis, just creating a lucrative and highly unstable financial market in carbon credits.

National governments, representing their own financial and corporate interests, are inherently incapable of addressing climate change, a global crisis produced by the operations of the capitalist market itself. Only through the overthrow of the profit system by an international movement of the working class can society’s resources be rationally deployed on a world scale to address the mounting environmental catastrophe.



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