

Australian prime minister denounces students' climate-change protests

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Australia's Liberal-National Prime Minister Scott Morrison issued an extraordinary denunciation of high school students protesting over climate change from the floor of the federal parliament on Monday.

Morrison's comments were in the lead-up to a national series of high school "walk-outs for climate action" this Friday, including in Sydney, Melbourne and other capital cities. Protests have already been held involving students in regional and rural areas over the past weeks. The actions have been shared and promoted by thousands of young people on Facebook.

Morrison contemptuously declared, during question time in the House of Representatives, that "kids should go to school." He stated, "We do not support our schools being turned into parliaments... What we want is more learning in schools and less activism in schools."

The clear message was the young people should keep quiet and that measures should be taken to discourage students from engaging in political action, and to punish those who do.

Morrison's comments demonstrated that the Coalition government and the entire ruling establishment are intensely fearful of the entrance of students and youth into political struggle. They are well aware that there is widespread anger among young people over environmental destruction, endless wars, soaring social inequality and a turn to authoritarian and anti-democratic forms of rule.

Every opinion poll of young people has demonstrated growing hostility to Labor, the Liberal-Nationals and the entire political set-up. There is also mounting opposition to capitalism, and an attraction to a socialist alternative.

A report by the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), a right-wing think tank, worriedly noted in June that the overwhelming majority of Australian young people

have indicated that they favour socialism over capitalism.

The parliamentary parties know that their agenda of tax cuts for the wealthy, the destruction of public healthcare and education, an offensive against jobs, wages and conditions, and the ever-closer alignment of Australia with the US-led preparations for war with China, will produce mass opposition.

Amid a slowdown of the property market, acute social inequality and mounting poverty, the ruling class is sitting atop a social powder-keg. Throughout the 20th century, and the first two decades of the new millennium, social movements among students and young people have always presaged mass struggles by the working class.

While they have been small thus far, the character of the high school climate protests has no doubt caused concern within ruling circles. They have been organised independently of the official political parties, including Labor and the Greens, as well as the unions, and inspired by similar protests by students in Scandinavia and throughout Europe.

The movement has largely been built through social media, amid an ongoing discussion in ruling circles in Australia, and internationally, on the need to crack down on the dissemination of political information online and the use of the internet to organise the struggles of workers and young people.

The issue of climate change, moreover, points to the urgent necessity for the reorganisation of the world economy in the interests of social need, not private profit.

A report released this week by the US Global Change Research Program found that the impact of climate change is "already being felt" and that it is "expected to further disrupt many areas of life, exacerbating

existing challenges to prosperity posed by aging and deteriorating infrastructure, stressed ecosystems, and economic inequality.”

The Coalition government is particularly sensitive to growing concern over the environment. It is dominated by “climate change skeptics” who deny the global consensus of scientists that anthropogenic climate change is a reality, in large part because of the Coalition’s close ties to the coal industry.

While the federal government has responded to the high school protests with unbridled hostility, Labor, the Greens and environmental groups aligned with them are seeking to kill the incipient movement with kindness.

On Tuesday, Labor and the Greens joined to pass a motion through the Senate “commending” the protests. Their aim is to channel the demonstrations behind the official parliamentary establishment, which has always been the graveyard of social movements.

Labor and the Greens’ posturing on climate change is utterly hypocritical and bogus. Both are parties of the corporate and financial elite, hostile to any measures that would impact on the profitability of big business.

The Greens-backed federal Labor government of Julia Gillard did nothing to stem carbon emissions, when it was in office from 2010–2013. Under its signature carbon tax policy, Australia’s carbon emissions actually increased. According to Labor’s own 2012 modelling, if the tax had remained in place from 2012 to 2020, annual national carbon emissions would have grown from 582 million tonnes to 621 million tonnes by 2020.

Emissions trading schemes, touted by the Greens, are no less worthless. Where they have been introduced in Europe and elsewhere, they have succeeded only in establishing lucrative opportunities for “green businesses” and creating new markets based on financial swindling and speculation.

The claims of the Greens that they represent an alternative to Labor and the Liberal-Nationals lie in tatters. Wherever they have had the opportunity, at the state or federal level, they have joined big business coalition governments, committed to slashing social spending, driving up corporate profits and making the working class pay for the deepening crisis of the capitalist system.

This makes clear that the high school climate change

walk-outs can only go forward on the basis of implacable hostility to Labor, the Greens and the entire political establishment.

What is required is a new political perspective, oriented towards the mobilisation of the international working class, the revolutionary social force that produces all wealth, and whose objective interests are opposed to the dominance of society by a tiny corporate elite, and the irrational division of the globe into competing capitalist nation-states.

Climate change is a product of the private market and is an inherently global issue. It can only be resolved through the abolition of capitalism, and the socialist reorganisation of society by the working class.

Under socialism, the vast productive forces and technological capacities developed by the working class would be harnessed to resolve all social problems, including climate change. Trillions of dollars would be allocated to ensuring the rapid reductions in carbon emissions required to halt climate change. The technologies for carrying this out, which already exist, would be developed on the basis of the collaboration of scientists from all over the world. The subordination of scientific work and research to the profit demands of the corporate oligarchy would be ended.

This revolutionary, internationalist and socialist perspective will be elaborated at Socialist Equality Party meetings on the 80th anniversary of the Fourth International, the world party of socialist revolution, in Sydney on December 2, and in Melbourne on December 6.



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