

Australian students speak out at climate strike

Our reporters
16 March 2019

Tens of thousands of Australian high school students participated in internationally coordinated strikes yesterday, demanding immediate action to reverse climate change and end environmental degradation.

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), the youth wing of the Socialist Equality Party, explained at the protests that the destruction of the environment could only be ended through the construction of a mass movement of the working class aimed at reorganising world society along socialist lines, to meet human need, not the profit dictates of a tiny corporate elite.

The rallies in Sydney and Melbourne, which numbered over 30,000 each, were attended by a diverse layer of students from private and public schools hailing from every area of both cities. The protest in Newcastle, a working class regional centre north of Sydney, involved around 2,000 students. IYSSE campaigners spoke with many of the protesters.

In Sydney, Zac, a year 10 student, said: “I’ve come here to support the demand for climate action, coming from all of the students and the younger generations here. It’s a great way to raise awareness, because for us young people we are talking about the world that we will live in the future. The destruction of the environment is taking away the things that we need to live.

“I can see that climate change is a product of capitalism. The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. And the rich are using things, like all of the resources we have, and it’s taking away from the rest of society. We need awareness to be raised, and people in parliament who don’t recognise climate change need to be pushed out.”

Nathan commented: “Politicians are investing in things that are harming the environment and jeopardising our future. They’re not investing in renewable energies. Politicians get money from the banks and from companies

like Adani. And they control the political agenda. We’re not being positively impacted by that.

“Inequality is really there, and it’s growing every single day. If we don’t do something about it now, it’s just going to keep growing. Things for young people are getting worse, in terms of the gap between the rich and the poor and the lack of jobs. If we don’t take a stand against the government now, then nothing is going to improve.”

Akkul, a hospitality worker originally from India, said he came to the protest, “because I have been concerned about climate change since I saw the film, *An Inconvenient Truth* by the former US presidential candidate Al Gore, many years ago.

“I’ve seen drastic change in the country I’m from, India. Bangalore is now rated as one of the worst cities in the world to live in, because it’s contaminated with so much industrial waste everywhere, including in the rivers. In another five or six years, it will be an unlivable city. I want to save it, because it is one of India’s nicest cities and it is where I am from. The same thing is happening in the so-called developing world everywhere.

“Businesses and people who are just going after money are hurting the planet. Why are they harming the environment and other people they are living with? Just for profit. It’s a crime and we should stop it. As individuals, we cannot stop these billionaires, because they will just do whatever they want, they have all the money. It means we need to build a movement of all ordinary people.”

Asked about the growth of militarism and war, including the recent clashes between India and Pakistan, Akkul commented: “I have Pakistani friends who are beautiful people. It is just the politicians who are creating all of these conflicts.”

In Melbourne, Corryn, a high school graduate who wants to study environmental issues said: “The purpose of

today is so that the government sees there are people that really want to see change in the climate crisis right now. With the volume of people here I hope that we have gotten the message across that we want the government to do something.

“It’s a global effort. If one country makes a progressive effort toward climate change and others do not, it’s not going to really make a big difference. It’s worldwide. Every country needs to do their bit.

“There are only 100 companies and corporations which make the largest contribution towards carbon emissions each year. I don’t think that’s very fair. There’s a small number of corporations that have the biggest impact on the environment. It’s not democratic and it’s not majority rule.”

The Melbourne IYSSE also spoke to Cielle, Annabelle, Katarina, Kristen, year 12 students.

Kirsten said: “A lot of people say that nothing’s going to happen when we go on strike, but that’s wrong. You’ve got to raise awareness on these issues. We’ve got to prove that we really believe in this, and that it’s really important to us. If we, as teenagers, say this is a big issue, then it is.

Katarina stated: “We don’t want to be ignored anymore. We want this issue to be taken seriously.”

Annabelle said: “It is an international effort, and that’s why this is so important. It’s around the world. It’s not just Australia, it’s everywhere. There are over 100 protests across the world. It’s all on the same day. I think that we, as students, are really getting our message across.”

Cielle added: “I think that the government didn’t believe we could have such a strong voice. This goes to show the adults that we do have a voice, and we are using it.”

Annabelle said: “A socialist society is where we should be headed. It’s where we can join together in a community association. Capitalism is about who’s at the top, and the power structures always winning. It’s so important that socialism is a voice in this conversation.”

Luke, a year 10 student, attended the Newcastle rally with around 140 classmates. He said: “The youth feel really compelled for change to happen. We need to change it before things, before they get worse. Otherwise, climate change will get to the point where it can’t be reversed. This is one of the most important things for our generation to address.”

“It’s very true that past governments have been suppressing and diverting this issue, even the Gillard

Labor government, which was supported by the Greens. In a lot of countries, political parties and governments hide important issues from the youth. They don’t want us to make a ruckus like we are now.

“The rich don’t really need to care, they don’t have to deal with the situation and they can just avoid it. I do agree that the working class definitely should start their own organisations. I’m pretty sure my entire school would be interested in reading more of your literature as well.”

Shae-lee and Cameron said they came to the Newcastle rally “because the government isn’t listening to what’s happening and doesn’t want to make any hard decisions.”

“We want to force the government to listen to us,” Cameron said.

Shae-Lee added: “We have this thing called the HSC discussion group, where a lot of year 12 students discuss the issues surrounding the climate strike. Some people were saying, ‘We care more about the economy than the environment,’ but how can you even think that? You’re not going to even have an economy if the world is in shambles!”

“People care more about their money than our home,” said Cameron, “they discount all the different means of alternative energy and think coal is the only way.”

“Plus, people attack individuals for the problems of climate change,” said Shae-lee, “but they don’t address the big corporations that are actually causing all this pollution.”

Willie, originally from Vietnam and now studying environmental management at Newcastle University, said: “I think it’s important that young people are acknowledging what is happening and acting on it, because they are the ones who are going to suffer the short-sighted political decisions of today. They are the future. Politicians today care more about profit than the issues facing the environment.”

IYSSE campaigners outlined the internationalist and socialist perspective of the Trotskyist movement. Willie responded: “You have parties in other parts of the world as well? And you have a connection to the Russian Revolution? I’ve heard of that, it’s a big moment in history. I want to learn more about your perspective.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact