

Australian students and youth speak out at climate strikes

Our reporters
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As many as 350,000 students, young people and workers across Australia took part in the internationally-coordinated climate strike last Friday, in the country's largest protests since the mass rallies against the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The strike in Australia was among the largest in the world when compared to the size of the population.

An estimated 150,000 participated in Melbourne, along with 80,000 in Sydney, 30,000 in Brisbane and tens of thousands more in capital cities around the country. Sizable rallies and marches were also held in dozens of regional and rural centres. More than 5,000 people marched in Newcastle, a working-class city in New South Wales, while thousands more rallied in cities and towns such as Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong.

Speakers, including high school students, referenced various manifestations of the climate strike. The perspective advanced by the organisers, however, was limited to futile appeals to the government, and the other capitalist parties, including Labor and the Greens, whose policies have contributed to the environmental crisis.

Members of the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) explained that climate change is a product of the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, which are also threatening nuclear world war. They insisted on the need for students to turn to the working class and take up the fight for a socialist perspective.

WSWS reporters spoke to a number of those in attendance.

In Melbourne, **Sarah**, a carer, stated: "I am worried that nothing's ever going to get done through parliament. They always promise things and nothing ever gets done. They always say 'look at all these things that we're going to get done,' but things are just getting worse."

Her friend **James**, a vending machine operator, added: "Money and greed dominates the interests of everyone who is in parliament. They are in it for the money. None

of them—not even Labor or the Greens—are going to do anything about this or any other issue."

When asked about broad social issues, including the drive by governments to war, poverty, and dictatorship, Sarah and James said they approached the IYSSE table because it featured persecuted WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

James said that "the US is gearing up for another war, which will leave nothing. There will be no one left behind after the next world war." Sarah added that "nuclear fallout is a very real danger the way things are going."

Sarah said that Assange "should be freed straight away. I don't even think he should have been locked up in the first place. He tried to tell the truth and the US and others didn't like it." James commented: "What is scary is that he even revealed that the US was killing their own people and covering it up. They're happy to even kill their own people if it's in their interests."

Pewie, originally from Malaysia, said: "I think it's fantastic that this is a global protest. This is possibly one of the most important movements to build in our lives. We are now at a point of no return in regard to the climate crisis. To be able to continue to fight for social, ecological, and financial rights, you can't do it unless there's an Earth to do it on so we need to be here protesting."

In Newcastle, **Sarah**, a high school student, said: "I think it's good that this rally has brought together a lot of young people, because this is our future and we need to start defending it. It's great that these protests are going on across different countries. The environmental crisis is a worldwide problem. It won't be resolved by just one country making a change, there needs to be a worldwide effort to resolve it.

"Governments haven't taken any action because their only focus is on making more profit. Why would they want to change? You've got a tiny percentage of the

population that has such a huge percentage of the world's money. They're just getting richer and richer, and there's no-one drawing a restraint on that and forcing them to contribute to the rest of society. Young people and workers need to come together to defend the planet because this is our future and your children's future that's really at stake here."

Her friend **Bianca** added that: "The wealthy business owners are riding around on their private jets instead of spending that money where it's needed, and at the same time the government takes money from Medicare, health and education and from everyone in the working class, the ones who are actually doing all the work. The high-earning businesses should have their profits divided more to places where it's needed, like education and the environment."

In Sydney, **Liz**, a chef whose restaurant closed to allow staff to attend the demonstration said: "We need efficient change, not just screaming but actually getting things done with real alternatives. I haven't the foggiest idea what the solutions are, I'm a chef! But I know there are solutions and they are not being used."

Liz said while she is concerned about climate change, the most urgent issue is war. "While we're here today at the climate change strike, I don't think that the world will be under water or on fire in 10 years," she said. When asked about the recent accusations by Saudi Arabia and backed by the US that Iran attacked their oil refineries, Liz answered, "I think it is a load of bollocks, Iran is being victimised and the US is behind this acting like the puppet masters."

Sage, an 18-year-old high school student, said: "A big issue with the system that we live in right now is how capitalism encourages profit over creativity or team work or actual solutions to systemic problems because as long as the system produces profit then who cares, right? The change needs to come from the companies who are involved in coal and oil who are making it harder for us to make changes. You can't keep capitalism, the way the system was designed was that eventually leads to crisis and you have to move into a more socialist system."

In Brisbane, **Amitee** and a group of Year 11 and 12 students carried hand-made signs voicing disgust at the failure of the political establishment to address the environmental disaster.

Amitee said: "We're here because obviously we want to say something, because no one else is going to pick up. If we continue to ignore the issue, it will only progress to get worse and we will not have a future."

Her friends joined in. "The governments are too scared to do anything because they want to make profits, rather than save the planet. They are not looking into the future," one said.

Another member of the group said: "The Great Barrier Reef is dying. It has been dying for a while, and it just gets swept under the carpet. There would not be thousands of people here protesting against climate change if it wasn't real. It's a big deal."

The students rejected the attempts of governments and business leaders to blame ordinary people for the crisis caused by the drive for corporate profit. "They supply the cars and the things that we use that destroy the environment," one said. "It's become normalised, so we can't really help it. But more and more people are becoming aware, and so governments and business are trying to blame individuals for the problem."

Caleb, who is currently looking for work, said: "I'm here because I care about the planet. I feel a bit hopeless sometimes, sitting at home, and seeing all the news about it, and nothing's being done. It was awesome today to rock up and see the streets full of people. I've got a big smile on my face. It's giving me a bit of hope."

Caleb disagreed that governments could be convinced to change course. "I've read online, like your statement says, that 70 percent of all greenhouse gases came from 100 major companies. It's very disgusting, and they barely pay any taxes! They put it on us, trying to distract us from the real problems. Are they going to listen to us if we don't have enough money to bribe them? Our government just gave the top 10 percent a massive tax cut, and they're running out of money in the budget!"



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