

Australian Greens bogus posturing on bushfire crisis

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Over the past weeks, the Australian Greens have sought to capitalise on widespread anger over the failure of successive governments to put in place any measures to mitigate the impact of catastrophic bushfires that have hit broad swathes of the country.

The fires have claimed 28 lives, destroyed more than 2,100 houses and laid waste to millions of hectares of bush and pastoral land. They have exposed the immense gulf between the official political establishment and the corporate elite it represents, and millions of ordinary people who have been left to respond to the disaster on their own.

Prominent Greens parliamentarians have denounced Prime Minister Scott Morrison, whose indifference to the plight of bushfire victims has made him the central target of popular anger. They have sought to burnish their credentials as environmentalists who have warned of the impact of global warming for many years.

At the same time, the Greens have been careful not to go too far. When they have addressed rallies organised by high school and university students and environmental activists, Greens representatives have sought to channel anger behind the very parliamentary set-up responsible for the crisis.

Far from calling for Morrison's resignation, the Greens have suggested a means for him divert widespread public opposition into safe channels. The party initiated the call for a Royal Commission into the fire crisis at the beginning of the year. This lifeline was quickly picked up by Morrison and senior government figures, who stated that they would consider convening a commission as part of their "response" to the disaster.

Royal Commissions are a standard means used by governments to defuse anger over contentious issues, including official wrongdoing and illegality. Such commissions invariably drag on interminably, before

whitewashing authorities and issuing toothless recommendations that governments are free to ignore.

Most strikingly, the Greens have made virtually no criticism of opposition Labor Party leader Anthony Albanese. Labor has played a central role in seeking to prevent opposition to the Morrison government from getting out of hand. Albanese has for months made only the most tepid criticisms of the government, while insisting on the need for "national unity."

A clear political chain of command has emerged. While the government has responded with unconcealed indifference to the fire crisis, Labor has sought to dampen down popular anger. In this it has received political support from the Greens. In this way, all of the official parties have sought to ensure that the immense social anger brought to the surface by the fires does not threaten the parliamentary set-up.

The Greens' cynical maneuvering reflects its character as a pro-capitalist party with a core constituency among the affluent sections of the upper middle-class. During a federal election last May characterised by mass hostility to all of the major parties, the Greens publicly campaigned for closer collaboration with Labor and advocated the formation of a coalition government.

The Greens have used the fire crisis to intensify their overtures to Labor, and to promote their previous record in propping up a right-wing, pro-business Labor government.

Adam Bandt, the party's only MP in the federal House of Representatives, has repeatedly hailed the record of the minority Labor government of Julia Gillard, which was kept in office by the Greens between 2010 and 2013.

Earlier this month, Bandt tweeted: "A few short years ago, Australia had world-leading climate laws thanks to

Greens, Labor & independents.” Bandt was referring to the Gillard government’s “carbon tax.” At a rally on the weekend in Melbourne, he also hailed the legislation, expressing hope that Albanese was in the midst of an “epiphany” that would see him emulate Gillard’s stance.

The presentation of the “carbon tax” as a silver bullet that addressed climate change is a sham. It exposes the fact that the Greens, for all of their rhetoric about the environment and global warming, accept the framework of the profit system which is responsible for the crisis.

In reality, as the WSWS noted when the measure came into effect in 2012: “[C]ontrary to Gillard’s claims, carbon emissions in Australia are set to increase under the new tax regime. According to the government’s own figures, national emissions will rise from 582 million tonnes to 621 million tonnes by 2020. A nominal 5 percent reduction in emissions will be registered via the purchase of dubious carbon credits on the global market that supposedly represent emissions-reducing schemes in other countries” (see: “The Labor-Greens carbon tax hoax”).

The passage of the tax had been advocated by key sections of big business. It was seen as the first step in a shift towards further measures, taxing the consumption of ordinary people, and the establishment of an emissions trading scheme, similar to those established in Europe. Such schemes, involving the purchasing and trading of credits for emissions, have done nothing to reduce global carbon outputs and have created a lucrative financial market characterised by speculation and dubious business practices.

The Greens promotion of this pro-business agenda went hand in hand with its tacit support for Gillard’s entire regressive agenda. Her de facto Labor-Greens government aligned Australia with a massive military build-up directed against China and intensified the assault on fundamental democratic rights, including by supporting the US-led vendetta against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange over his exposure of Washington’s war crimes and global diplomatic intrigues.

The carbon tax was one prong of a series of big business policies. These included forcing 100,000 single parents off their benefits and onto the poverty-level Newstart unemployment allowance, stripping

many of them of hundreds of dollars per week.

Gillard’s government opened up the education and health sectors to the market to an unprecedented extent, and did nothing to expand national disaster relief measures.

The government’s woefully inadequate response to the 2011 Queensland floods provided just a pittance of assistance to the tens of thousands left destitute by the disaster. The government placed the military in charge of the response, in a bid to intimidate popular anger, and greenlighted the refusal of insurance companies to assist those whose homes had been destroyed.

The Greens pro-business record at the federal level has been replicated by its support for right-wing state governments, including an administration in Tasmania that sought to close dozens of schools and sack thousands of public sector workers. This austerity agenda, imposed by every government over the past 30 years, has resulted in a deepening social crisis that is greatly intensifying the hardship caused by the fires.

On the issue of the environment, the Greens have promoted, not only the carbon tax and emissions trading schemes, but also the worthless calls for carbon reductions made at a host of international summits. Even the woefully inadequate measures decided upon at such gatherings are routinely ignored by governments around the world, including in Australia.

As the Socialist Equality Party alone has insisted, addressing the environmental crisis, and defending the social and democratic rights of the working class, is possible only through the revolutionary, socialist reorganisation of society on a world scale. The banks and the corporations must be placed under public ownership and democratic workers’ control. The vast resources created by the international working class must be harnessed on a global scale to resolve the climate crisis, and to meet pressing social needs, not private profit.



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