

The climate change disaster and Australia's new anti-democratic electoral laws

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Global warming—which all the scientific evidence proves is an existential threat to human civilisation—is among the many critical issues on which Australia's political establishment cannot afford to allow any genuine debate.

It is no coincidence that the Liberal-National government and the Labor Party rammed draconian party deregistration laws through parliament in August just as the protracted political crisis over climate change was reaching a new peak in the lead-up to the COP26 gathering in Glasgow.

As the events of the past few weeks in Canberra, Rome and Glasgow have demonstrated, the corporate elite and its political servants in Australia, like their counterparts worldwide, have blatantly refused to take the measures urgently needed to halt a catastrophic global temperature rise.

Left in their hands, coal, oil, gas and other fossil fuels will continue to be mined and burnt for decades more, with Australia among the main culprits. That is despite the latest analysis by the United Nations Environment Program, released last week, which found that even if governments meet all the current emissions-reductions commitments, temperatures are likely to rise 2.7 C this century, a level that calls into question the future of humanity.

There is deep concern, especially among young people, and huge global protests have been triggered by signs of already irreversible impacts on the world's weather patterns and ecosystems, such as disastrous bushfires, heatwaves, floods and ice cap melting.

The new anti-democratic electoral laws, followed by the voter-ID bill tabled in parliament last week, are designed to prop up the failed capitalist political establishment and stifle the outrage among youth and working people.

Parties not currently represented in parliament, including the Socialist Equality Party, will be deregistered and unable to have their names on ballot papers if they fail to submit the details of 1,500 members—triple the previous number—to the electoral authorities by December 2. And many working-class, poor and vulnerable voters effectively will be denied the right to vote by the imposition of official ID requirements at polling booths.

This is under conditions of popular disgust at the weeks of backroom haggling between the Liberal and National parties to produce a token commitment to “net zero” carbon emissions by 2050—that is in three decades' time.

Even after a pact was finally struck between the coalition partners, it remained totally secret, blocking any public scrutiny of all the concessions made to the mining and agri-business industries.

The net zero “plan” ultimately released by Prime Minister Scott Morrison last week was a patent sham. It contained no new policies!

All the proposed emission reductions are to come from government subsidies to big business, unproven technologies such as carbon-capture and storage, or unknown future technologies. To the tune of tens of billions of dollars, the government is lining the pockets of the same corporations and wealthy elites that have created the climate crisis.

One thing was made plain. The “plan” would not affect the coal and gas mining and exports on which the federal and state governments and the Australian capitalist class as a whole depend heavily for revenues and profits. “It will not shut down our coal or gas production or exports,” Morrison declared.

As for the Labor opposition, it is backing illusions in other governments' similarly phoney “net zero by

2050” promises in Glasgow, and appealing for the support of the financial elite. It has already ditched its previous, inadequate target of a 45 percent reduction in emissions by 2030.

Likewise, the Greens promote the delusion that the Glasgow event could turn the global warming tide. Greens leader Adam Bandt depicts US President Joe Biden as a shining hope, saying he was “bringing together a global alliance to rapidly reduce gas use.”

Bandt is again appealing for the formation of another Labor-led government, sharing power with the Greens, saying “the only way to get climate action” is by “putting the Greens into balance of power, so we can push the next government to take the climate action the science requires.”

The fraud of Bandt’s claim has been highlighted by the outcome of last week’s G20 summit in Rome. It showed that the negotiations in Glasgow, the 26th such round since 1992, will fail to avert the catastrophe—just like all the previous talks.

The G20 communiqué was even weaker than the Australian government’s position, calling vaguely for net zero to be achieved “by or around mid-century.” Defying calls to end coal-fired power generation by 2030, the G20 leaders adopted a meaningless pledge for countries to “do so as soon as possible.”

Overshadowing such gatherings are concerns among many governments about threatened climate-based trade and tariff sanctions by the US and EU. These threats have nothing to do with saving the planet. They are a means of gaining economic and geo-strategic advantage over their rivals, particularly China. At the same time, wealthy countries have failed to deliver their 2009 pledge to provide \$US100 billion per year in climate finance to poorer countries by 2020.

This impasse shows how the fundamental characteristics of world capitalism block any genuine global climate plan. On climate change, as on the COVID-19 disaster, social inequality and the lurch toward war, its affairs are determined by two factors: the profit interests of giant corporations and the super-rich, and the conflicting strategic interests of rival nation-states.

An effective response to climate change requires a massive reallocation of resources to meet social and environmental needs. It necessitates a rational economic plan coordinated on a global level. Vast

developments in science and technology make it possible to limit climate change to manageable levels while providing a high standard of living for all.

But this is impossible while the key levers of the economy are controlled and operated in the interests of corporate profit. What is required is the struggle for socialism, based on a turn to the working class, the social force whose fundamental interests align with reconstructing society to address the climate crisis.

That is the fight being conducted by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International. To ensure that the SEP has the elementary democratic right to have its name on ballot papers and workers can vote consciously for this essential socialist program, we urge all our readers and supporters to oppose the reactionary electoral laws and sign up as electoral members of the SEP.

At the same time, we urge all our readers and existing electoral members to study the SEP’s Statement of Principles and apply to become full members of the party in order to help build the urgently-needed socialist political leadership in the working class.



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