

Australian high school students denounce major parties at climate rallies

Our reporters
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Yesterday, thousands of Australian school students, along with workers and other young people attended rallies across the country to protest the inaction of governments on climate change.

More than 20 School Strike 4 Climate events were held in Australia yesterday, as part of a global youth demonstration with rallies in more than 600 locations worldwide. Some 2,000 took part in Sydney, with similar numbers in Melbourne. Several hundred attended in the regional working-class city of Newcastle in New South Wales.

The young people expressed grave concerns, about not just climate change, but the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the growing threat of nuclear war and the overall social crisis caused by capitalism.

By contrast, the official speakers at the rallies raised none of these broader political questions. Instead, the organisers attempted to channel the protesters' anger and frustration into criticisms of Prime Minister Scott Morrison as an individual. Futile appeals to Morrison were combined with the promotion of illusions in Labor and the Greens. This was sharply expressed by a last minute change of venue for the Sydney demonstration to the prime minister's residence, Kirribilli House.

International Youth and Students for Social Equality campaigners at the rallies raised with the young protesters that the climate crisis, along with the pandemic and drive to war, are products of the capitalist system. None of these issues can be addressed through appeals to the official capitalist parties. Instead, students and youth must turn to the construction of a revolutionary and socialist movement of the working class (read the IYSSE statement distributed at the rallies: "To end climate change, war and the pandemic, take up the fight for world socialism!").

IYSSE campaigners spoke to students in Sydney, Newcastle and Melbourne and attended a Brisbane protest that was affected by heavy rains.

Elodie and **Robbie**, high school students in Melbourne, said the approach of Australian and international

governments to climate change was a "disgrace." Elodie said, "I wouldn't even call it action, there's been no action."

Both agreed capitalism was responsible. Robbie said: "Capitalism is about corporations that want profit. That includes building factories, using fossil fuels, fracking, all of those things which are horrible for the environment... but it's about making a profit, not about caring about the people whose communities they're destroying. I think that's largely the fault of capitalism."

They pointed to the necessity for an international response to climate change. Robbie said: "Just because some countries aren't specifically affected by climate change as we are or as much as other areas are, it doesn't mean it doesn't matter. It's a global effort to stop climate change."

Elodie agreed: "All countries have to come together to battle this problem. It's a global issue. We can't do this alone. I think money shouldn't be going to the military. I think money should be going to tackling climate change. Militarisation is never the answer to anything."

Robbie said: "I think that when we fund the military too much, we give the impression to other countries that we want to be in a war, that we want to engage in violent activities just to claim what's ours or fight over nothing. And I think that we shouldn't be spending money on that. We could be spending money on much more useful things, like climate change, giving better help to indigenous communities, all of those things that matter more than militarisation."

Students **Yasmyn** and **Mackenzie** also attended the Melbourne rally. Mackenzie said: "The governments are not doing enough about climate change and it's a big issue. They don't care about our future, they only care about money."

Speaking about the escalating conflict in Ukraine, Yasmyn said: "If nuclear weapons start coming into the mix, then no one's going to win."

She raised the brutal role of the US over the past two decades: "9/11 happened and the US thought it would be a

good idea to retaliate and they've been bombing the Middle East for decades. They had no reason. They killed more people in the Middle East than were killed in 9/11.

"The US government wouldn't care [if millions died overseas from nuclear weapons] because, at the end of the day, they don't care about the people. They care about money and power. That's been clear with the whole COVID crisis and the Middle East. It's all about money."

Rosie, a Year 10 student, said she had come to the Melbourne rally because: "I just want to get my voice out there.

"In our generation, everyone is stepping up and I think that's such a great thing. It's great the crowd we're seeing today, all different ages. There's women and men in their sixties speaking up for the world."

Rosie formerly lived in California, and told WSWs reporters about her experience with major bushfires. She said: "Oh my god it was awful, especially where I lived, every day you had to wear a mask for the smoke and it affected day to day life. There's no funding for firefighting. Communities were destroyed, it was awful."

Zoe, also in Year 10, said: "Nothing is being done to help the environment. Our earth is changing and it's being destroyed by what we are doing. I'm here to protest because we need to stop this. We need to cut back on fossil fuels, move to renewables and save the earth before it's too late.

"The government no longer has a duty of care over our generation. They are against helping the climate, and they're hardly doing anything to help people that are affected by the bushfires or by the floods. They have the money, but they're putting it towards war."

Audrey, a Sydney high school student, said she had come to the rally because, "I think this is one of the only ways I can make a difference as a young person. I don't have any political power; I can't vote.

"The Morrison government, with the floods, the bushfires, the vaccine rollout, the lockdowns, they've handled it poorly because they don't care about the Australian people. Their main interest is not the wellbeing of citizens but their own profit. It's the same with the environmental crisis.

"All the major political parties in Australia are just concerned with profit. Environmentalism and stopping global warming is not going to be profitable. Anything that is going to cost money, they ignore.

"I don't think climate change is going to be solved by all the countries working separately. I think we can only really, truly, make a big difference if everyone works together."

Chloe, another high school student at the Sydney rally, said: "Scott Morrison's attitude to climate change is disgusting. I don't think he believes in it, and if he does, he doesn't care. That's just insane to me because it will really

harm all of humanity in the next few decades. Already we've seen bushfires like in 2019 which were amplified by climate change.

"But the major parties are all kinda sucky when it comes to action on climate change. They're all focussed on money. They don't want to do anything because Australia's economy relies heavily on coal. But money doesn't matter in the long run if we're all dead.

"In Australia, you can see that the capitalist parties are ignoring the climate and other issues our society faces in order to keep powerful people and companies wealthy. It's disgusting.

"My friend actually spoke at one of these rallies a couple of years ago, but she can't be here today because of COVID. It's been pretty bad. Most people in my year at school have had COVID. The Year 7s couldn't come to school for a few weeks, because around a third of their year got sick.

"So many people passed away because the government was focussed on opening back up. The lockdowns could have been handled a lot better. They could have kept small businesses afloat, while also making the public more safe, especially immune-compromised people, who still risk their lives coming outside.

"COVID is still so prevalent right now and it is still taking so many lives. This could definitely have been avoided."

Bee, a 17-year-old student in Newcastle, said: "I've been part of climate strikes in Newcastle for a couple of years now. I think it's important to be rallying for things we believe in. The prioritisation of society somehow needs to change towards people's wellbeing and general health.

"I think there's a relationship between capitalism and climate change. There's a hesitancy to stop using fossil fuels, they're worried about massive profit losses.

"I've actually started reading some Marxist theory, I have a somewhat loose understanding. I wanted to know what it was about. I saw a copy of the *Communist Manifesto* in a bookstore and thought I would give it a go."



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