

School Strike 4 Climate organisers turn Australian youth climate rallies into campaign for Labor-Greens

Martin Scott
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Last Friday, around 1,000 young people and workers attended a School Strike 4 Climate (SS4C) rally outside Sydney's Town Hall to protest government inaction on climate change.

The protest, along with several others around the country, was billed as an "election climate strike." The clear aim of the SS4C organisers is to "get out the vote" for Labor and the Greens in advance of the May 21 federal election. Many of the events were not strikes or even mass demonstrations at all, but stunts held outside the offices of members of parliament.

One such event was a "sit-in" outside the Brisbane offices of Liberal-National defence minister Peter Dutton, attended by only a dozen or so protesters.

The purpose of these stunts is to promote illusions that the ousting of Scott Morrison's Liberal-National government, and its replacement with Labor and the Greens, will reverse decades of government inaction on climate change. This is a cynical fraud. Labor is a party of big business and, if elected, will continue to subordinate human life and the environment to the profit interests of the corporate elite.

For all their posturing on climate change, the Greens' objective is to elect a Labor minority government in which they hold the "balance of power." In reality, the Greens will go along with Labor on every significant issue. The "climate policies" advanced by both parties are centred around subsidies to big business and "market-based" solutions designed to enrich the financial elite, while doing nothing to reduce emissions.

The transformation of the SS4C movement into an outright election campaign for parties responsible for the climate crisis is the culmination of years of attempts by the organisers to subordinate young people to the political establishment.

The latest protests have taken this years-long operation to new heights of political cynicism and deceit.

SS4C is promoting Labor amid its most right-wing election campaign in decades. Labor leader Anthony Albanese has pledged to defend the interests of the mining barons, including through the establishment of new coal mines.

On other key issues, Labor is seeking to outflank the Coalition from the right. Albanese is pitching Labor to the corporate elite as a better vehicle for implementing sweeping cuts to social spending and deep-going pro-business restructuring. He is competing with Morrison, over which party is more bellicose and aggressive in its support for the US-led confrontations with Russia and China, which threaten nuclear war.

SS4C's promotion of the warmongering, pro-business Labor Party exposes it as a political fraud that has no perspective for tackling climate change or any other issues facing young people. The purpose is to shut down any challenge to an economic system in which every aspect of human life and the environment is subordinated to profit.

While the Sydney rally did not feature parliamentarians on the platform, almost every speaker called for a vote against Prime Minister Scott Morrison and the Liberal-National Coalition government. None of those addressing the rally—including a representative of the Labor-aligned Electrical Trades Union (ETU)—put forward any suggestion of what it should be replaced with, but the implication was clear.

The speakers did not explicitly mention Labor or the Greens because they are aware of a growing recognition among workers and young people that a government formed by these parties of big business and war will simply mean more of the same.

For years, Labor and the unions have played a critical role in preventing any, even limited, measures that would threaten the super-profits of the fossil fuel and mining magnates. The unions have argued that these industries must continue to operate unfettered by environmental regulations in order to protect jobs, even as thousands of mining and energy workers have been thrown on the scrapheap with the unions playing the role of company enforcers.

ETU assistant national secretary Michael Wright argued Friday that greater investment in renewable energy would mean “we could bring manufacturing back.” In essence, Wright was making the case for environmental policy designed to subsidise corporate profits.

This is completely in line with Labor’s “Powering Australia” plan. Albanese told the Australian Chamber of Commerce last week that: “The enterprise investment opportunities of climate change action will be the next source of productivity growth for the country.”

The lie that the mounting environmental catastrophe can be resolved through the “free market” was exposed with the carbon tax put in place by the Greens-backed Labor government of Julia Gillard in 2012, which actually saw Australia’s greenhouse emissions increase.

Albanese made clear last month that a Labor government would not block new coal and gas mines. While the Greens insist Labor can be pressured into action on climate change, Albanese declared on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s “Q&A” program last Thursday that the party would not increase its 43 percent emissions reductions target.

The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) intervened at the Sydney rally to provide young people with an alternative perspective. SEP campaigners distributed copies of the party’s election statement, as well as the International Youth and Students for Social Equality statement, “The fight for a future free of climate change and war is the fight for world socialism!”

SS4C organisers refused to allow SEP candidate for the NSW Senate Max Boddy to speak from the platform, on the spurious grounds that the 33-year-old Boddy was too old and that the event was “featuring First Nations voices.” In truth, Boddy was prevented from speaking as part of a conscious effort by the organisers to suppress any discussion of an alternative, socialist, perspective.

The recent protests are a mere shadow of mass demonstrations held in previous years. In September 2019, up to 350,000 young people and workers across Australia took part in protests against climate change

inaction. Tens of thousands of high school students walked out of class to attend the strike rallies, prompting harsh denunciations from the Liberal-National government, the right-wing media and then federal Labor leader Bill Shorten. Teachers who publicly supported the rallies were threatened with punitive measures.

The changed character of the protests by no means reflects a lack of determination among young people to tackle the existential threat of global climate change. Instead, it is a product of the bankrupt perspective advanced by SS4C organisers and speakers in successive rallies since 2018.

The forthcoming election will do nothing to resolve the climate crisis. Preventing climate change, and the other existential threats confronting young people and workers around the world—the COVID-19 pandemic, nuclear war and spiralling inflation—requires a fight to end capitalism.

The only social force capable of waging such a struggle is the international working class. It is to these layers that the growing numbers of politically conscious young people who are serious about combatting climate change must turn. This means a break with Labor and the Greens, as well as the unions and “activist” groups such as SS4C, which do their bidding.

We urge workers and youth who want to fight for a socialist economy based on social need, not private profit, to contact the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality and join the world socialist movement today.

Contact the SEP:

Phone: (02) 8218 3222

Email: sep@sep.org.au

Facebook: [SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia](https://www.facebook.com/SocialistEqualityPartyAustralia)

Twitter: [@SEP_Australia](https://twitter.com/SEP_Australia)

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