The climate change crisis and the Australian election

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The Socialist Equality Party (SEP) statement for the May 3 Australian federal election warns that the climate catastrophe is one of the "existential issues posed by the crisis of capitalism," alongside the twin dangers of war and fascism.

Rapidly rising global temperatures, a product of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, primarily produced by the burning of fossil fuels, threaten the planet with ecological collapse. Among the greatest dangers are rising sea levels, more intense and frequent extreme weather events, and increasing outbreaks of diseases, all of which threaten the world's population with injury, illness, displacement and death.

The SEP's candidates in the election are both exposing the treacherous role played by all the capitalist parties in allowing this crisis to unfold and explaining the only political program that can halt climate change: socialism.

Far from being a distant threat, climate change is already impacting the lives of millions of people, including in Australia. Extreme weather events are becoming more common, with heatwaves and intense fire weather contributing to more severe bushfire seasons, such as the catastrophic Black Summer fires of 2019–20 in Australia.

Polling from the Climate Council indicates that 84 percent of Australians have been directly affected by at least one climate-fuelled disaster since 2019, including heatwaves, floods, bushfires, droughts, destructive storms and landslides.

Climate change is also affecting critical ecosystems. Increased ocean temperatures have led to six severe coral bleaching events at the Great Barrier Reef in nine years, the most recent of which was confirmed earlier this month.

This is a worldwide crisis. 2024 marked the first calendar year for global temperatures to exceed 1.5? above pre-industrial levels. The warming has been accompanied by "widespread adverse impacts and related loss and damages to nature and people," as stated by a 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report.

Some of the most serious consequences include hundreds of thousands of deaths from increased heatwaves, and millions more people exposed to food and water insecurity. Hundreds of millions of people are projected to be displaced from rising sea levels inundating coastal communities, a process already well underway.

For decades, successive federal governments have continued to support fossil fuel corporations, bringing Australia's domestic CO2 emissions to 370 megatons in 2022. This makes Australia the eighth-largest emitting country on a per capita basis.

But it is Australia's fossil fuel exports, particularly of coal, that make it one of the most substantial contributors to the planetary climate crisis. It is responsible for 1.5 gigatons of CO2 emissions every year, making it the second-largest emitting country, only behind Russia, which has five times the number of inhabitants.

Millions of voters are rightly concerned and outraged about the total lack of action from governments. That became a factor in the 2022 election defeat of the former Liberal-National Coalition government, which left people to fend for themselves in the Black Summer fires and the 2022 floods.

Labor barely scraped into office with less than a third of the vote. Nevertheless, much of the capitalist media hailed the 2022 election as historic because Labor promised "strong climate action."

There can be no doubt now how fraudulent that claim was, given Labor's record during the past three years.

During that time, Labor has doubled down on gas extraction through the "Future Gas Strategy" of 2024 and approved ten coal mine expansions that will collectively produce almost 2.5 gigatons of CO2 emissions.

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Labor's flagship climate policy—a toothless "Environmental Protection Agency"—was dropped at the behest of the mining giants, particularly in Western Australia.

Nor has the Labor government taken any steps to safeguard people from the increasing threat of extreme weather disasters. This was exposed this year with the intense flooding in northern Queensland in February and the serious impacts of Tropical Cyclone Alfred in March. None of the basic issues of vulnerable infrastructure, inadequate disaster relief payments and lack of disaster preparation have been addressed.

The undeniable scientific reality is that events like these will become more frequent as the climate crisis intensifies.

As everywhere else in the world, the poorest and working-class members of society pay the price. Soaring home insurance premiums and the increasing numbers of uninsurable homes— particularly those in low-lying, flood-risk areas—leave many workers without the means to either protect themselves or recover from the climate disasters.

No less than in 2022, the "choice" between the Coalition and Labor on climate change is a sham. To the extent that the climate is even mentioned in their election campaigns, nowhere can a scientific program to halt the climate crisis be found.

Opposition leader Peter Dutton promotes the use of nuclear power as a means to discredit the need for a vast expansion of renewable energy. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese claims his government "trusts the science," while covering up Labor's unrelenting support for fossil fuels. Neither party has issued a 2035 climate target, which is expected as part of the next round of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement.

The emissions target of net-zero by 2050 touted by both Labor and the Coalition is equally phoney. First of all, their track records give no reason to believe they will follow through with it. More importantly, the vast body of scientific literature on climate change mitigation shows that there must be a rapid and immediate reduction in emissions to net-zero by 2035, to keep global warming as close to 1.5? as possible.

Labor and the Coalition alike have both committed to continued fossil fuel use and expansion that would see Australia's emissions increase, not decrease.

The Greens posture as critics of the two major parties but are equally devoted to shoring up the capitalist profit system. The SEP warns in our election statement: "As climate change spins out of control, the Greens promote the hoax that environmental disasters can be averted in a world where corporate profit and national interest are the overriding priorities."

The Greens' track record is damning. The Greens-backed Labor government under Julia Gillard saw Australia's emissions increase from 2010 to 2013. Now in 2025, they are pleading once again for a coalition, either formal or de facto, with the same Labor party that is actively supporting the fossil fuel companies.

The scientific resources and technology exist to mitigate climate change, but under capitalism they are squandered on war and propping up the big corporations.

Furthermore, capitalism is rooted in the nation-state system, which obstructs the global response required to adequately deal with the climate crisis. As the SEP election statement explains: "Every issue confronting humanity, from war to climate catastrophes, pandemics and dictatorship, is global in scope and requires a unified response from the international working class."

Only the SEP and its candidates are explaining the truth to workers and young people. This election will solve nothing. The capitalist parties offer nothing but climate disaster on top of war and austerity. Trillions of dollars must be invested in scientific research and development to deal with the climate crisis.

For this, the colossal fortunes of the billionaires must be expropriated and placed under the control of the working class, which produces all of society's wealth. Nothing short of the overthrow of the disastrous private profit system and the complete and global reorganisation of society on a socialist basis under democratic workers' control can achieve this.

This is the fight workers and young people must take up to save the planet from environmental disaster. We urge people to get involved with our election campaign and, above all, join the SEP to build it into the mass party that the working class so urgently needs.

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