

Australia: Greens promote bankrupt parliamentary appeals at NDIS protests

Stephen Griffiths
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Last Saturday, disabled people and their supporters demonstrated in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart and Perth in a national day of action opposing the Albanese Labor government's \$38 billion cost-cutting attack on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Labor's NDIS measures will force more than 300,000 disabled people off the scheme over four years—the largest single cut to any Australian social program in history. Almost two-thirds of those removed from the scheme are under the age of 18, with no alternative support available from state governments.

While these cuts will cost lives, confine people to their homes and shift burdens onto families and unpaid carers, the Albanese government has boosted military spending to nearly \$60 billion annually.

At the Sydney rally of around 200 people, chairperson Sam Noonan, a blind activist, told the assembly: "We demand the government stop the cuts before they can do more harm. We demand they fund the NDIS and not war.... We're sick of being treated like burdens, and we do not consent to Labor's policy of eugenics, because that's exactly what this is."

In Brisbane, about 90 people heard Orielia, a disabled activist, explain the impact of cuts that Labor had already imposed, even before its latest measures. The NDIS authorities had "declined my permanent power wheelchair application that I need to function, and expects me to go back to a manual wheelchair that I cannot physically propel."

Around 350 people attended the Melbourne rally, where one speaker, Grace, detailed how Australia's housing crisis had impacted her and others with disabilities. She explained that when she became homeless, every organisation she turned to "agreed we

needed help, [but] they couldn't give it or direct us to any other appropriate support. Everyone we spoke to agreed that we were doing all the right things, but the system was set up without a person like me in mind."

Although attendance at these events was low, this does not reflect the deep-seated popular opposition to Labor's assault on the NDIS. More than 4,000 submissions opposing the Albanese government's attack on the NDIS were made to a Senate inquiry, along with powerful testimony from scores of organisations and individuals at public Senate hearings on the cost-cutting legislation.

The health, welfare, education and other sections of the trade union movement, which have either ignored Labor's assault or offered advice and amendments on how to impose the NDIS cuts, boycotted last week's protests. Likewise, the Greens, who posture as opponents of the planned measures, made no attempt to mobilise their members for last Saturday's protests.

From the outset, the Greens, who have been promoted and provided with political platforms by the pseudo-left, have systematically worked to divert popular opposition into politically bankrupt and dead-end appeals to Labor and Liberal-National Coalition parliamentarians.

This was spelled out at the Perth rally by Greens Senator Jordon Steele-John, the party's chief spokesperson for disability. He urged attendees to "pick up the phone. Send an email. Contact members, particularly of the Liberal Party. In the Senate, they will have the deciding votes on whether this bill passes. We have eight days to be, for want of a better word, as annoying as possible."

Steele-John's promotion of the Liberal-National Coalition is a damning exposure of the Greens and their reactionary parliamentary agenda. Opposed to any

independent mobilisation of the working class, the Greens insist that the far-right, big-business Coalition, which unwaveringly supports Labor's NDIS measures and every other anti-working-class attack, can be pressured into defending disabled people.

That illusion mongering was refuted just days after the rally, with the financial press reporting that the NDIS cuts would "sail through" parliament after an agreement between Labor and the Coalition. While posturing over disability, knowing that the bipartisan NDIS cuts will pass parliament, the Greens continue to collaborate with the Labor government in a host of other areas.

The task facing workers who want to defeat this historic assault is to fight for the independent mobilisation of all those in struggle against the Labor government's class-war agenda. The NDIS cuts are not an isolated attack but the central pillar of the Albanese government's assault on health, education and other vitally necessary social spending to fund its pro-war military spending.

In Victoria, tens of thousands of teachers have twice voted down sellout agreements by the state Labor government and the education union, to slash their pay and conditions. Last week, South Australian nurses rejected a union-endorsed Labor agreement that would have reduced their real pay, and Victorian doctors have voted for strike action against the conditions in which they are forced to work.

These and other workers' struggles must be developed and unified in a national political and industrial struggle against the Albanese government's cost-cutting agenda.

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters campaigned at last Saturday's rallies, warning that the cuts to the NDIS were part of a broader assault on the entire working class. Campaigners urged attendees to register for and attend its forthcoming August 16 online public meeting, held in conjunction with the Committee for Public Education and the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee, which will discuss the socialist perspective required to fight Labor's attacks.

At the Melbourne rally, the WSWs interviewed **Liz**, who has been an NDIS recipient for eight years and said she was completely dependent on the program. "It's allowed me to change my life, but it can so easily take things away. And that's my greatest concern...

[The Labor government] thinks it can cut social community hours and see if that's okay. I've had other conversations where they want you out in the community and then they want you back in nursing homes.

"You should be able to go and ask for more help but instead, asking for more help can put you in jeopardy. It can lead to your plan being changed without your knowledge. I've fought for other things that I've won recently, but you shouldn't have to fight if you can prove your case. For me and others, we need it for life and we rely on it," she said.

The NDIS is "not about the participants anymore," she continued. "When it began it was about, 'We're here for you, and what do you need as a participant?' But now it feels like a factory, a one-size-fits-all approach. But it's never going to be one size fits all. My needs and plan will always be different to someone else's needs and plan...

"I'm in fear of dealing with this the rest of my life. It gives me anxiety because you never know what you're going to get. I'm still waiting for things to be paid for from the time when I didn't have a budget, and I'm still fighting for them to pay more than four grand owed to different providers."

Elizabeth also attended the day of action in Melbourne. "I've always been a Labor voter," she told the WSWs, "but they've certainly lost my vote since this happened. I'm very disappointed. It was amazing when the NDIS first started, but now it seems to be all coming undone.

"I'm thinking about how the system is going to be made more complex, even though it's already complex enough to get services and have applications for equipment approved. You're always having to justify your needs, your existence, which is very undignified. I shouldn't have to justify my existence like that. I'm sure there is some fraud going on, but not as much as the government makes it out to be. I think a lot of it is administrative flaws in the system."



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