Australian school students strike against far right

Our reporters
16 August 2026

High school and university students around Australia walked out of class on Thursday for a day of action against the far-right One Nation party. Rallies were held in all the state capital cities, as well as smaller regional centres. Some 3,000 students rallied in Melbourne, around 2,000 in Sydney, and over 1,000 in both Perth and Adelaide.

Students from a wide range of schools, both private and public, located in middle-class inner suburbs as well as outer working-class areas, participated. They denounced One Nation, a far-right, anti-immigrant outfit that has come to prominence amid the crisis of the two-party system and is being promoted by sections of the ruling elite to shift official politics even further to the right.

Many students had created their own placards, with some reading "blame billionaires not immigrants," "not another Trump," "power of the people is greater than the people in power" and "keep fascists out, not immigrants."

The rallies pointed to a politicisation among young people. In discussion with campaigners for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), attendees expressed hostility to the genocide in Gaza, the US-led war against Iran, the climate crisis and the broader lack of a future offered to young people by capitalism. There was interest in and sympathy for a socialist perspective.

The organisers, however, sought to prevent any discussion of those broader issues. The rallies were called by the National Union of Students (NUS), which is dominated by Labor Party careerists and whose executive also includes members of the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative (SAlt).

SAlt, which largely ran the protests, turned them over to Greens politicians. Together, they confined their speeches to denunciations of One Nation and its leader Pauline Hanson, outside of a broader context. The rallies were essentially a call for One Nation's electoral defeat, including in the November Victorian state election and a New South Wales election next year.

Because Labor is widely despised as a party of war and austerity, the speakers avoided explicit calls to support it. But their formula, of "fighting One Nation" exclusively at the ballot box was a clear call for the reelection of Labor governments.

In Melbourne, Greens state parliamentarian Samantha Ratnam delivered the main address. She condemned Labor and the Liberal-National Coalition for "creating the conditions for the far right to rise," through their assault on housing and education, as well as attacks on immigrants.

The entire perspective of the Greens, however, is to collaborate with and form coalitions with Labor governments. In the 2025 federal election, the Greens dropped their posturing over the Gaza genocide and the climate crisis, pitching themselves as a "reliable" partner for Labor. The Greens, in other words, are a component of the official political establishment responsible for One Nation's rise. Ratnam called for young people to "support campaigns" against the far right, i.e., the Greens in the forthcoming Victorian election.

An identical perspective was put forward by SAlt speakers. Shovan Bhattarai, a SAlt member and candidate for its electoral front in the 2027 New South Wales (NSW) state election, made references to One Nation as a capitalist party. She remarked, "We cannot trust the Labor Party to fight Pauline Hanson."

The presentation of Labor as an unreliable ally in the fight against Hanson and One Nation is a complete inversion of reality.

Labor is in government federally and in the majority of states. It is not only responsible for the rise of One Nation, by inflicting a social crisis on working people which the far-right exploits. Labor is itself carrying out a far-right agenda, involving war abroad and a war on the working class.

That includes supporting the Gaza genocide, the illegal assault on Iran and completing Australia's transformation into a frontline state for war with China, all in collaboration with American imperialism and its fascistic commander-in-chief Trump. Labor has enacted police-state measures against opposition to genocide and war, is persecuting immigrants and refugees and carrying out sweeping austerity, including a gutting of the National Disability Insurance Scheme that will claim the lives of disabled people.

Bhattarai declared that "in 2027 there's a really important election coming up [in NSW]" and that "we're going to hand out how-to-votes on election day to build the forces of socialism," adding "We are building up forces of resistance and we will win."

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The references to “socialism” are cynical political window dressing. What Bhattarai and SAlt are outlining is a de facto electoral coalition, extending from the Greens to Labor, with the SAlt providing these capitalist parties with some “left” rhetoric.

SAlt has nothing to do with socialism or the working class. It is a party of affluent layers of the upper middle-class, which seek to advance their own privileges within the existing socio-economic and political order. That includes defending and being integrated into the corporatised union bureaucracy and now seeking election to parliament through reformist electoral fronts that are within the framework of capitalist parliamentary politics.

In opposition to the official line, IYSSE campaigners insisted that the fight against the far right is a political struggle against the Labor government and capitalism itself. The task was not for students to campaign for the parties of big business in forthcoming elections, but to build a movement of the working class against the entire official political set-up based on a socialist and revolutionary perspective.

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At the Melbourne rally, **Willow** said she had come “to fight with other students against Pauline Hanson” and defend the interests of minorities under attack. She reflected on the broader situation facing young people under capitalism: “We need to fight for a future where we are all included, where we are all happy and able to exist, where our existences aren’t a debate, where we have stable jobs in the future. And when we aren’t $30,000 in debt from university fees.”

James, a year 12 student, said, “Hanson is actively trying to strip away rights of trans people, but also the rights of immigrants and other minorities. This is not how things should be, someone like her as an official politician. It’s crazy that we have to do things like this.”

James spoke on how One Nation is using a populist pitch to manipulate growing social opposition. “They’re exploiting people’s anger over the cost-of-living crisis, and weaponising that against immigrants, blaming them for the crisis. It takes a step back and a logical eye to ask, who is really the source of all of our social problems? It’s not immigrants, it is the top 1 percent of society.

“As an average working person in Australia, are you closer to [mining billionaire and One Nation supporter] Gina Rinehart or are you closer to an international student or a worker who has just come from overseas? One Nation does not have your best interest in mind.”

Maddy, a university student at Swinburne, said she was here “because I don’t support fascism. I want to try and go into journalism for independent media, and Hanson wants to get rid of any kind of free press. Her proposal to cut healthcare even further than now, and to attack immigrants. We have to fight against this. One Nation is going to destroy the future for people my age, like what Trump is doing in the US.”

two year 12 students in Sydney, explained: “The fact they’re cutting so much funding to education, raising student fees, this is really unfair, because education is a basic constitutional right.” They also spoke on Labor’s attacks on immigrants: “Australia has such strict policies on immigrants. It is following in America’s footsteps. And Pauline Hanson has been influenced by Trump.”

Another **year 12 student**, from the western suburbs, said, “I really do think that the Labor Party is pretty similar to One Nation. It’s kind of shocking. I know that Labor has been cutting our international student enrolments, scapegoating international students for the housing crisis. The universities rely on international students for their funding.”

In Adelaide, three friends, **Harvey**, **Chanel**, and **Eric**, said they wanted to protest against not just One Nation but “also the Liberal and Labor Party.”

Harvey said, “Labor isn’t trying to stop this from happening. They are actively fitting into fascism. They’re a part of capitalism.”

He denounced Labor’s involvement in the Iran war and the Gaza genocide: “It’s horrible. This is a disgrace against human nature. Labor is doing nothing to stop this, just like they’re doing nothing to stop Hanson. There are babies being killed over there. That’s not acceptable.”

Chanel drew a connection to Labor’s historic cuts to the NDIS and its wider attack on health and education. “I think what they’re doing with the NDIS proves that they’re just not on our side. And any party that doesn’t publicly state that they’re actually against what One Nation is doing, shows they don’t have ordinary people in mind.”

Harvey agreed that workers need to unite against capitalism in order to fight the far right: “All the parties are trying to criminalise workers and especially criminalise young people who are fighting for a change. They all try to push us against each other, make workers fight each other, when we should be fighting the government, the people in power.”

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