

Australian Labor government stages phoney climate gathering in South Pacific

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The Albanese government last week staged a carefully choreographed display of concern for the “Pacific family” at a preparatory meeting for the UN Conference of the Parties (COP) 31 climate summit, which will be next month in Türkiye.

The pre-COP meetings in Fiji and Tuvalu, from October 5 to 8, were billed as an opportunity to bring “the world” to the Pacific and to place the existential threat of rising seas at the centre of global climate negotiations.

In reality, the gathering exposed the fraud at the heart of the Labor government’s climate policy, and the real purpose of its diplomatic offensive in the region: the consolidation of the Australian and US imperialist grip over the South Pacific in preparation for war against China.

The event was, in the first instance, an embarrassment for the Australian government, which had spent months promising that a host of world leaders would travel to the region to witness the climate emergency first-hand. In the end, just 14 government leaders made the trip, and only two—Timor-Leste’s José Ramos-Horta and Mauritius’ Dharam Gokhool—came from beyond the Pacific. Together they account for a negligible fraction of global emissions. The leaders of the major imperialist powers all declined to attend.

The gathering produced no formal COP decisions. A declaration involving representatives of 30 countries called for “deep, rapid and sustained emissions reductions,” but there is no legally binding obligation on any of the signatories to carry out such measures.

Very few new pledges were made for the Pacific Resilience Facility, a funding mechanism for climate adaptation and disaster preparedness. Reuters reported on October 7 that total pledges stood at less than \$US200 million, compared with a goal of \$US1.5

billion.

The Pacific island states are on the frontline of the climate catastrophe. In Fiji, six communities have had to be relocated from their homes due to increased floods and landslides from climate change; another 17 communities comprising thousands of people are on a government “red list” for urgent relocation.

Tuvalu, home to 10,000 people living mostly less than two metres above sea level, faces annual flood damage projected to exceed its entire gross domestic product (GDP) by the end of the century. These are not distant projections for Pacific peoples, but the consequences of a crisis for which they bear no responsibility.

Feigning concern for this catastrophe, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese declared in Fiji that “climate change is not a problem for the future. It is here right now.” He warned of a summer of floods, cyclones and extreme heat, and insisted the world could not allow the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C to “slip from our grasp.”

This is from a government that has, since taking office in 2022, exceeded its Liberal-National Coalition predecessor in green-lighting new coal and gas projects. Australia is the world’s third-largest exporter of fossil fuels, and ranks second in terms of climate damage from those exports, trailing only Russia. The emissions released when Australian coal and liquefied natural gas are burned abroad—some 1.2 billion tonnes of CO₂ in 2023 alone—dwarf the country’s domestic emissions.

Over the past four years, the Albanese government has approved at least 31 new coal, oil and gas developments, locking in a cumulative 6.5 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, or 12.5 percent of global annual emissions. Labor’s “Future Gas Strategy”

commits to expanding gas extraction until “2050 and beyond,” and its sham 2035 emissions reduction target falls far short of the 90 percent reduction by 2035 that scientists say a 1.5°C pathway requires.

The hypocrisy reflects Labor’s broader agenda, which has never been about mitigating the climate crisis. The government’s main policy focus has been to accelerate preparations to assist a US-led war against China, including by transforming Australia into a base for war.

Australia’s relationship to the Pacific is of a neo-colonial character. It is joined by other imperialist powers in bullying smaller, impoverished countries into joining them in their offensive against China.

That campaign was on display at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) summit held in Palau last month. Australia, the US and New Zealand subjected the island states to intense pressure to condemn a Chinese missile test, while remaining silent on Washington’s own tests in the Marshall Islands and its 67 nuclear detonations there.

Australia announced a \$430 million “maritime security initiative,” known as Waqa Moana, which will embed Australian police and military forces across the region under the pretext of countering drug trafficking. The US unveiled a \$150 million package tied directly to its military build-up, including the redevelopment of ports and airfields for use against China.

The Albanese government is also expanding a network of security agreements across the region. Agreements with Tuvalu, Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG) have sought to give Canberra decisive influence over their security policy, critical infrastructure and, in some cases, foreign policy options.

The Nauru agreement, announced in December 2024, requires consultation or mutual agreement over engagement in key sectors, including security, banking and telecommunications. The arrangements with PNG and Tuvalu likewise deepen Australia’s strategic presence, while limiting the island states’ room to manoeuvre amid competing pressure from Washington and Beijing.

The use of Nauru, now named Naoero, as an offshore Australian prison further exposes the neo-colonial character of this relationship. The Albanese government reopened the Australian-financed detention

facility there in 2023 and uses it to incarcerate asylum seekers and former immigration detainees.

The imperialist powers, including Australia, have nothing to offer the island peoples but threats, militarisation and empty promises of climate finance that never materialise. Nor can workers and students in the Pacific place any confidence in government treaties or talks like the annual COP process. Year after year, these summits produce nothing approaching the measures needed to limit warming to 1.5°C, a milestone that the world is close to surpassing.

At COP 30 in Brazil last year, the largest delegation outside the host country was sent by the fossil fuel lobby, whose 1,600 representatives occupied one in every 25 places at the summit. None of the leaders of the world’s five largest emitters was present.

The climate crisis cannot be resolved within the framework of the nation-state system. It is rooted in the capitalist mode of production, which subordinates all social needs to private profit and divides humanity into rival powers. The working class of Australia, the Pacific nations and China have a common interest in overturning that system.

The struggle against climate change is inseparable from the struggle against war and for socialism. Only on that basis—the socialist reorganisation of production on a world scale, in the interests of humanity rather than profit—can the existential threat facing the Pacific, and the planet, be overcome.



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