

Australia: Thousands protest government inaction on bushfires and climate change

Our reporters
22 January 2020

On Saturday, several thousands of young people demonstrated in Melbourne, the Victorian state capital, in opposition to the official response to the ongoing bushfire crisis across the country.

The protests reflect the deep hostility and distrust that ordinary workers and youth have for successive Labor and Liberal-National coalition governments who have refused to act to mitigate bushfires or take any action on climate change, which is contributing to the severity of droughts and fire danger.

Like earlier rallies, the events were organised by Uni Students for Climate Justice, which is affiliated with the pseudo-left Socialist Alternative. The pseudo-left are seeking to channel the mass anger in the population into a parliamentary dead-end, calling for the replacement of Prime Minister Scott Morrison with another figure from the Liberal-National coalition government, and the future election of a big business Labor Party government.

Summing up the bankruptcy of their perspective, Socialist Alternative's Cormac Ritchard told the Melbourne rally: "If the Liberal MP who follows Morrison won't [tackle climate change]—and they won't—then we'll sack them as well. And if the Labor Party government that comes in after them won't do it—and they won't—then we'll sack them as well."

Organisers lead young people in juvenile chants, such as "ScoMo's a wanker," "F*ck ScoMo" and "ScoMo's got to go."

Socialist Alternative's Kath Larkin—a leading figure in the Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU)—also spoke at the Melbourne rally. Larkin denounced the "so-called Labor opposition," as well as the Morrison government, but then proceeded to promote the Labor-aligned and thoroughly corporatised trade union movement.

She singled out the United Workers' Union—which is aligned with the Labor right-wing—and the RTBU for their statements of support for the protest. Larkin was silent on the negotiations between the RTBU and rail and tram operators over new enterprise bargaining agreements announced at the end of last year and the upcoming tram drivers' strikes scheduled for January 28 and 30.

The solution to the climate change crisis, according to Larkin, does not extend beyond the confines of the capitalist profit system. She echoed the call made by Socialist Alternative's Jerome Small at last week's rally for a politically ambiguous "mass civil disobedience movement."

None of the speakers mentioned the words "capitalism" or "socialism." All of the speakers promoted the claim that "protest works" and governments could be pressured to act on climate change. Their positions are in stark contrast to the growing awareness among young people internationally that decades of appeals for action by the ruling elite and its political representatives have failed, and that a struggle to end the capitalist system is necessary.

In Melbourne, Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaigners and *World Socialist Web Site* reporters found a warm response from workers and youth at the rally for a revolutionary, internationalist and socialist program.

Speaking with WSWs reporters, musician **Josh** said: "The government isn't doing anything about the fires. ScoMo went to Hawaii and left us to burn. There wasn't enough done to reduce the impacts of it. And they saw it coming for a long time and did nothing. They [Labor] are just sell outs. They're in it for their own gain."

In response to the SEP's revolutionary perspective,

Josh said “I fully agree. I’m done with just protesting. Something needs to actually happen, because they’re not listening to us.”

Jennifer works in philanthropy and attended the rally with Mark, and daughter, Rose. She said, “The government is not doing nearly enough. They’ve got a ridiculous position about climate change, complete denial, in bed with the coal industry. We vote against it whenever we can but it’s clearly not enough. So we want to keep sending a signal that we’re unhappy.”

Victoria University nursing student **Yasmeen** told the WSWs: “The fires are happening and the government doesn’t seem to be doing anything at all. You can only do so much raising money on social media. Climate change is real and it is going to have a terrible impact on future generations. It all comes down to money and how much they can make. But what is the point of improving economically if there isn’t going to be anywhere to live?”

Marcus noted that “the fires are definitely climate change induced, I think we have to stand up to the government and actually demand that they do something. I think the response is focussing on emergency and disaster planning. I see that as a Band-Aid effect. I think you have to get to the root cause, and the root cause is climate change.”

High-school student **Jessica**, originally from New Zealand, said she thinks “climate change is the biggest issue we are facing. I think there is too much greed, and profit is prevalent. Once there is money and power—there’s too much. I think that climate change is not unconnected. Everything that happens has to take into account climate change. Social justice has to be tackled.”

Matt, from the outer-eastern Melbourne suburb of Boronia, told WSWs reporters: “The situation is getting worse. I don’t think politicians want to hear about this. In Australia we have a Prime Minister who brought in a lump of coal into the parliament. I vote Labor but I don’t think any of the parties have made climate change a priority. Even the Greens and independents do deals that do not assist this cause.”

Translator from Britain, **Maddy**, said: “I’m interested in the issue of climate change. I’ve read about it and it’s scary. I’ve come to realise that it’s an unavoidable symptom of the capitalist system which is based on exploitation and maximising profits, as if

there are no consequences.

“It’s going to take a huge movement of people to change this. Political leaders are trying to appease business. I think that Scott Morrison is corrupt and the ALP still supports coal despite everything that has happened. In the UK the ruling party doesn’t take any actions on climate change.”

She added: “The way it is framed is that ordinary people have to keep making changes, but even if we recycled everything it wouldn’t stop climate change. This has to come from government policy.”



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact