

New Australian Greens leader makes a “left” pitch to young people

Mike Head
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Adam Bandt, elected unopposed by Greens’ members of parliament on Monday, began his leadership with populist rhetoric in an attempt to win the support of young people who are outraged by the climate change crisis created by the capitalist profit system.

“We are in the middle of a climate emergency and long-running jobs and inequality crises,” Bandt told reporters. “People are angry and anxious because the government has no plan for the big problems facing the country. I call on everyone, but particularly young Australians, to join our movement for a Green New Deal so together we can fight to save the future.”

By installing Bandt, who is associated with the party’s supposed “progressive” faction, the Greens MPs demonstrated their concern over the mounting public hostility, particularly among the youth, toward the entire political establishment, which has been intensified by the country’s bushfire disaster.

With the Liberal-National Coalition government now loathed and discredited, and the Labor Party lurching further to the right to woo the corporate elite after Labor’s vote fell to a century low at last May’s election, the Greens are seeking to channel the political disaffection back behind the parliamentary order.

In last year’s election, youth and workers did not believe that the Greens offered any alternative. Across the country, the Greens’ vote stagnated at just above 10 percent and was mostly concentrated in affluent electorates, even though the votes for both Labor and the Coalition fell.

Addressing the media, Bandt promised to seek a “Green New Deal,” which he claimed could help halt global warming, reduce inequality and provide free public education and dental care. At the same time, there would be no departure from the central axis of his predecessor, Senator Richard Di Natale, that of forming another “power-sharing” capitalist government, preferably with the Labor Party.

Demagogically, Bandt declared he wanted to “turf this government out,” accusing the Coalition and big business of

“killing people” by making profits at the expense of human lives and safety. Yet, he also revealed that, far from calling for the removal of the government that he branded as “criminal,” the Greens remain committed to forming another pro-big business government.

Specifically, Bandt again hailed the record of the 2010–13 minority Labor government, which was propped up by a formal agreement with the Greens, as well as the current Labor-Greens coalition government in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and the present Labor-Greens-New Zealand First government in New Zealand.

Equally revealingly, Bandt made no call for the release of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, an Australian citizen and the world’s most prominent political prisoner. Assange remains incarcerated in a British maximum-security jail, facing a US extradition hearing this month, because both the Coalition and the Labor Party support the US drive to lock Assange away for life for revealing US-led war crimes and abuses.

Acutely conscious of the growing opposition in Australia and internationally to Assange’s persecution, Bandt last year joined a parliamentary grouping advocating Assange’s release. Like the rest of the group, however, he has said virtually nothing since and organised no campaign, rallies or public meetings to demand that the government intervene to secure Assange’s freedom.

Despite his anti-government rhetoric, Bandt told a media conference he would try to pressure Prime Minister Scott Morrison’s government to “take action” on climate change. He cited the Greens’ 2010 agreement with Julia Gillard’s Labor government as a model, saying “the only time that pollution has been cut in this country is when [the] Greens shared power.”

This is a fraud. The Gillard government’s carbon tax was a pro-business measure that sanctioned the increase of Australia’s carbon emissions from 582 million tonnes to 621 million tonnes by 2020. It served the interests only of “green” entrepreneurs and finance houses operating in carbon trading markets.

The Greens-backed Gillard government also signed up to the US confrontation with China, including through the stationing of US marines in Darwin, and fully backed the US vendetta against Assange. Domestically, it privatised disability services, undermined public education through NAPLAN standardised testing, and stripped parenting payments from thousands of single mothers.

Bandt, who told reporters he was happy to be described as a “Greens social democrat,” said Australia needed a “carbon price plus” program that included an “orderly plan” to phase out exporting coal and its domestic use by 2030.

In other words, the Greens propose an “orderly plan” that will not endanger the interests of the ruling class, including the energy conglomerates, which now claim to be gradually transitioning away from reliance on thermal coal, while ramping up the production of two other fossil fuels—oil and gas.

In an opinion piece for the *Guardian* this week, Bandt further insisted that “change is possible” within the capitalist profit system, echoing Barack Obama’s campaign for the US presidency in 2008, and Senator Bernie Sanders’ current bid for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination.

Bandt wrote: “With a Green New Deal, we can deliver a manufacturing renaissance, turning Australia into a renewable energy superpower exporting our clean energy to the world.” This is a reactionary nationalist program, based on the profit interests of corporations and financiers that are moving to cash in on new technologies and carbon credit schemes.

Bandt himself cited a World Meteorological Organisation report that found even if all countries met the emissions reduction targets adopted at various international summits, the world would disastrously warm by up to 3.4 degrees Celsius. That demonstrates the impossibility of averting catastrophe without ending the domination of the planet by nation-state governments, each committed to enforcing the profit requirements of their national capitalist class.

Far from opposing the “criminal” corporate ruling class and its political servants, the Australian Greens have played a pivotal role as part of the political establishment for decades. They first “shared power” in the 1989–92 Labor-Green Accord in the island state of Tasmania and maintained a similar partnership with a Tasmanian Liberal government from 1996 to 1998.

The Greens have held cabinet posts in a coalition government with the Labor Party in the ACT, based in Canberra, since 2012, as they did in Tasmania again from 2010 to 2014, where Senator Nick McKim—elected this Monday as the party’s co-deputy leader—tried to enforce a school closure program, provoking fierce resistance from teachers, parents and students.

In New Zealand, for the past two years the Greens have been part of Jacinda Ardern’s Labor-led coalition government, which has overseen increased poverty and housing insecurity and starved public services of funding and resources. Together with their other coalition partner, the right-wing xenophobic NZ First, Labor and the Greens have attacked democratic rights, strengthened the police, demonised immigrants and intensified preparations for war.

The Greens performed a similar function in Germany, joining the Social Democratic Party in a “red-green” ruling coalition between 1998 and 2005—another model invoked by Bandt. That government imposed a sharp rise in poverty and low-wage employment through the “Hartz IV” welfare-slashing laws and conducted Germany’s first overseas combat operation since the defeat of Nazism, joining the NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia in 1999.

Bandt entered politics as a student in the 1990s, aligned to pseudo-left groups and professing support for Marxism. He represents the “progressive” faction of the Greens, which has been concerned that the openly right-wing politics of Di Natale, who publicly canvassed “sharing power” with the Coalition, meant that the Greens could make no credible effort to head off the developing political radicalisation of workers and young people.

Any Labor-Greens government would seek to stifle and suppress the rising discontent to the ecological disaster, social inequality, assault on democratic rights and war danger produced by capitalism. This corporate-driven offensive can be answered only by the working class taking power, via workers’ governments, to completely reorganise society globally along socialist lines, placing the productive forces under democratic workers’ control to meet the urgent social and environmental needs, not feed private profit.

The author also recommends:

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[31 January 2020]



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