

More voices from the Australian climate strike

By our reporters
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Tens of thousands of Australian high school and university students participated in last Friday's global climate strike, demanding immediate action to end environmental destruction and halt accelerating climate change.

The rallies involved an estimated 30,000 people in Sydney, and similar numbers protesting in Melbourne. They reflected the politicisation of a generation that has grown up amid a deepening crisis of capitalism, spurring endless wars and widening social inequality.

Campaigners for the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) received a warm response from students and youth who were keen to discuss a socialist perspective on the environmental crisis, and the broader political issues confronting young people.

IYSSE representatives explained that like the growing threat of war, climate change was a product of private profit and the division of the world into rival capitalist nation states. They called for students to turn to the working class and insisted that the only way forward was the construction of a mass international movement, aimed at reorganising global society to meet social need, not private profit.

Olivia, a 20-year-old law and communications student at the University of Technology Sydney, said: "I'm part of a generation that is going to have to deal with the serious mess that is currently our climate. We really need some kind of wide-scale change and at the moment it's just not happening. We need our whole generation to come together and push for something that's going to be bigger than just this day and just this march.

"We have a system at the moment that's top down. We have people in power, not just the government, but massive corporations, who are about profit and about

power. That power comes from the top and filters down. The fact that we are out here today shows that there's a movement coming from the bottom and we need to be pushing up. The power of the people is massive and that's a really exciting thing to be around and be a part of. There isn't a single government or political party that is doing enough right now."

Flynn, a high school student from Heathcote, commented: "We keep giving corporations breaks for killing our earth. A hundred companies are responsible for 70 percent of climate emissions across the globe, but we still think that removing plastic straws is going to make a bigger difference than stopping them from poisoning the earth. It's complete rubbish. A lot of countries now are oligarchies. They're controlled more by big business interests than actual people."

His friend, **Lachlan**, added: "They're definitely looking for profit, without caring about the consequences. No one's really taking responsibility. It's become so normalised that no one will admit they've caused this problem. Governments need to take responsibility and initiate change in all their policies."

In Melbourne, **Summer**, a high school student, stated: "Something needs to be done about climate change and the government isn't doing anything. It is an international problem, so it needs an international solution. The fact that people from 98 countries are taking part in this shows that a lot of people in our generation want to do something. If we don't, our generation won't have much of a future."

Her schoolmate **Sophie** said: "The media and the government are saying that the students are just being used as political pawns. That's rubbish! That's saying that none of us have a brain! And we don't have an opinion! Which clearly is untrue. Just look around at all

these banners and posters! They are all so true.”

Grace, a Swinburne University student, commented: “It is so important. This is our future. This is the first time in so many generations that we have had to ask the question: ‘Should we even have kids?’ Because we don’t know if it will be worth it and whether they will have a decent life. That is our immediate future. It will happen in our lifetime. It is already happening. It is only 12 years before we are screwed if we don’t fix anything.

“If these rallies weren’t international, they wouldn’t mean anything, which is why it is so important that this is a global movement. It needs to be a worldwide struggle. That way, it’s not like: ‘Hello! Just this little part of Australia wants to do something!’

Chloe, a University High School student in year 10, said that she attended the protest because “we all really care about climate change. It is us that will vote in four years and grow up living on this planet. Some of the adults now really don’t care because they won’t be living on this planet when we are. So we really need to make a change for our own lives.

“It is great that we are all speaking out about what we believe in. Capitalism is such a big thing that I think sometimes we don’t question it anymore. But it doesn’t have great consequences for the environment or society.

“I really wish that a Labor government would actually do something about climate change, but I don’t think they will. I don’t think anyone in official politics will. Already, from the Paris climate change agreement, the results are not enough and they’re not even hitting their targets.”

Her friend, **Nina**, added: “I don’t think that they will follow through with their promises. And I don’t think that they are making the correct changes to help the planet.”

Otter, a high school student originally from California, said: “It’s a great example of solidarity, of the modern youth coming together trying to take control of their future and showing that they care, and that it is not up to the government organisations that have distanced themselves from the public.

“I don’t think they’re thinking about us and what will come after them. They’re just thinking about themselves and what’s going to help them in the near future. Everything is short-term, they are not worrying

about the long-term. They don’t ask, ‘what’s going to last us for the next one hundred or one thousand years?’

“It’s really important to take a stand for what you believe in and making sure we have a better future for the coming generations and the families and people who will come after us.”

Jed, a high school student, attended the rally in Newcastle, a regional working-class city north of Sydney. “These strikes are something that have needed to happen for far too long. The people at the top are a hindrance. We need to change what we are doing to the environment because we don’t have long left at all. The richest people in the top 1–2 percent don’t do anything.

“We’re talking about future generations and the survival of a new generation. Social inequality is a major problem. A huge number of people are getting poorer and poorer. In Australia, there are something like 200 billionaires who own the vast amount of wealth but the other 20 million or so are finding it difficult to get by.

“Wages have stagnated, inflation is growing, and they cut penalty rates two years ago. They have debt collectors from Centrelink going out harassing people who need money. We have the highest amount of debt in the world because people can’t afford living here. I get \$700 a fortnight but these billionaires sit on hordes of cash.

“Labor and the Liberals are sponsored by the coal industry and by other corporations. They are talking about a new coal-powered power station in the Hunter Valley. Why are they still using this old method? Why not fund new means for power? They are inventing new ways to make money, to dodge taxes, to privatise everything.”

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