

SEP candidate Carolyn Kennett exposes Labor and Greens at Auburn forum

Our correspondent
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Carolyn Kennett, the Socialist Equality Party's (SEP) candidate for the inner-western Sydney seat of Auburn in the March 26 New South Wales (NSW) state election, addressed a candidates' forum at Auburn Town Hall on Sunday March 13, organised by the Friends of Auburn Library Service.

Candidates from the Greens, Liberal Party, Christian Democrats, Social Justice Network and Standing up for the Inner West also spoke, along with the Labor Party incumbent. Each was allowed to give a four-minute introductory statement, followed by pre-prepared questions from invited community groups, and then questions from the floor. Responses were limited to one minute.

Despite its small audience, the forum clearly demonstrated that the SEP was the only party representing and articulating the independent interests of the working class. In her opening address, Kennett explained that the NSW elections were unfolding "amid the greatest failure of the world capitalist market since the 1930s." Austerity programs aimed at "making ordinary people pay for the trillions of dollars that were handed over to bail out banks and speculators during the global financial crisis" had already produced revolutionary movements in Tunisia, Egypt and the Middle East, and were prompting mass working class opposition in the United States and Europe. "An eruption of class struggle is no less inevitable in Australia," she said.

In this context, Kennett called for a "political rebellion against Labor and the trade unions" which were implementing austerity measures in Australia. She warned, however, that the Greens offered "no alternative". They insisted "ordinary people pay for the environmental disaster produced by the anarchy of the private profit system—a system they support and defend."

Kennett explained, "As part of the Gillard minority government, the Greens have already demonstrated their support for austerity measures and for Labor's market-based carbon "reduction" agenda, which will do nothing to reduce

global warming. Instead, it will create a new market in carbon for financial institutions to reap huge profits, while placing greater financial pressures on ordinary workers."

Kennett's characterisation of Labor and the Greens was borne out during the course of the forum. In her introduction, Labor's Barbara Perry said that she had a "track record of delivering some wonderful infrastructure" to the electorate, citing Auburn Hospital and the Community Health Centre. Perry said the NSW government had "very much invested heavily in education in the whole state so now NSW has the highest literacy and numeracy standards in the country."

These claims are risible. As discussion in the forum later revealed, Auburn hospital has technological deficiencies and ongoing staffing shortages, with many overworked nurses leaving, and many beds sitting empty while patients await treatment. The cause of this appalling state of affairs is state and federal underfunding. On the question of education, the NSW Labor government—in which Perry serves as Minister for Local Planning and Minister for Juvenile Justice—played a key role in enforcing the introduction of the federal Labor government's NAPLAN and MySchool league tables in NSW in 2010. NSW schools that "underperform" now face the threat of sanctions and closure. Such measures will only exacerbate educational and social disadvantage in areas such as Auburn, which is one of the poorest in Sydney.

As for other essential infrastructure, the Labor government has not even provided a functional public transport system in Auburn, with residents forced to rely on private bus companies.

Perry made clear that, if elected, Labor would continue to fight for the interests of business, as it has done for the last sixteen years. Under the pretext of the need for "securing new jobs," she claimed, "we need to have a stable economy. We've been able to do that as a government, and we've therefore been able to attract investment, which brings with it jobs." Her remarks were simply codewords for a new round of cuts and privatisations—and the suppression of any independent political movement of the working class—in order to create a "stable

economy” and “attract investment” from finance capital.

A NSW Labor government would not hesitate to employ anti-democratic methods to implement these policies. Asked by an audience member whether she agreed with Labor Premier Kristina Keneally’s decision to prorogue the NSW Parliament in December 2010, in order to prevent an inquiry into the sell-off of part of the state’s electricity network, Perry glibly replied that shutting the parliament down simply “happens at an end of term” and “on different occasions and for different premiers”.

Throughout the course of the forum the Greens’ candidate, Mike Kiddle, outlined an almost identical agenda to that of the Labor Party. Kiddle said, in opening, “Actually, although I’m a Green, I’m very interested in money. We can only do so much with the money we have. We need to think about what we allocate for education, what we allocate for infrastructure, what we allocate for other things.” In other words, there is not enough money to go around, so the working class will have to go without.

This is the same lie peddled by capitalist governments and leaders the world over. As the SEP’s election program points out, there is no shortage of wealth in Australia. The banks have recently raked in record multi-billion dollar profits, along with the major mining companies, and in 2009 “some 173,000 Australian millionaires controlled wealth of close to \$600 billion—not including their homes.”

During question time, Kiddle was at pains to further emphasise the Greens’ pro-capitalist credentials. When asked about his view on capitalism, and to outline the strategies he would employ to “equitably liberate the whole community’s cultural resources”, Kiddle replied, “Look, quite frankly, I have no problem with capitalism.” “The Greens believe in a market-based solution for the global warming problem”. He continued, “So look, I’m not embarrassed about that. Should I be embarrassed about that? Does anyone think they’ve got a better idea of how can we get the co-operation of everybody—we need to use a market-based solution”.

In reality, no market-based agreement can address global warming. Under conditions of an economic and social catastrophe being caused by the capitalist market in every country of the world, the Greens position reveals, yet again, their contempt for the lives and concerns of the majority of the world’s population. As for “co-operation”, this is impossible when each capitalist government, representing the interests of its own ruling elite, seeks to impose its own national solution on what is a global problem—by passing the costs onto its rivals.

The Auburn electorate has a particularly large immigrant population, with people from virtually every region of the

world. A member of the audience asked the candidates to comment on Greens’ national leader Bob Brown’s statements that if refugees could not prove they were “genuine” in their claims for asylum, they should be sent back to where they came from.

Kiddle responded, “The policy of the Australian government is what you’ve just stated—OK so that’s the policy of the Australian government—and I don’t think anybody here could state any other policy.”

The SEP’s Carolyn Kennett made clear that the SEP completely opposed this policy, declaring that “in striving for the international unity of the working class, workers must oppose every form of nationalism and discrimination and racism—particularly the persecution of immigrants and refugees. The SEP upholds the rights of all workers to live wherever they wish, with full citizenship rights.”

At the conclusion of the forum, all candidates were asked, “What actions would you/your government take to help re-establish a level of trust between voters and their government?” Labor’s Perry said there was a “degree of cynicism” in the electorate, before dismissively declaring that sometimes, when in government, “priorities change”. The Christian Democrat candidate said the main thing was “not to promise what we cannot pay for, and to be open and honest about it.” In line with the tenor of his earlier comments, Kiddle said he would “like to congratulate Reema on putting it very well”. The Liberal candidate concurred with this sentiment.

Differentiating herself from all the parties of the political establishment, Kennett declared: “The SEP states clearly and unequivocally: workers and young people should place no trust in these capitalist governments. The hostility which millions of voters feel toward the major parties is entirely justified.” She called for workers to make a complete break with them, and the unions, and to fight “for the development of a political movement that will bring to power a workers government, committed to reorganising economic and social life on the basis of social need, not private profit.”

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