Support the Socialist Equality Party in the NSW state election!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (Australia)

3 March 2011

The Socialist Equality Party calls on working people and youth to support our campaign and our candidates—Richard Phillips in Bankstown in Sydney's south west, Carolyn Kennett in the adjoining working class seat of Auburn, James Cogan in the inner western Sydney electorate of Marrickville, and Noel Holt in the regional city of Newcastle—in the March 26 New South Wales (NSW) state election.

The SEP advances a socialist program to fight for the interests of the working class. We oppose all the parties of the political establishment—Labor, Liberal and the Greens—and seek to unite working people in Australia and internationally to put an end to the capitalist profit system, which is responsible for ever-deepening attacks on living standards and jobs, unprecedented levels of social inequality, escalating militarism and war, the undermining of democratic rights, and environmental disaster.

The NSW election campaign is dominated by an immense chasm between the official parliamentary parties and the vast majority of the population. Most voters regard the cynical campaigns and promises of Labor Party Premier Kristina Keneally and Liberal-National Party opposition leader Barry O'Farrell with anger and contempt. Decades of experience have revealed that the government operates, not to meet the needs and concerns of ordinary people, but to serve the interests of big business and the super-rich.

The election itself is being overshadowed by the momentous events unfolding around the world. Amid the greatest economic failure of the world capitalist market since the 1930s, mass social and political struggles, driven by poverty, inequality and repression, are breaking out against regimes and governments that only represent a tiny financial and corporate elite. The revolutionary movements that began in Tunisia and Egypt are now sweeping through the entire Middle East. At the same time, mass working class opposition is developing in the United States and Europe to devastating job, wage and social spending cuts, which are aimed at making ordinary people pay for the trillions of dollars that were handed over to bail out banks and speculators during the 2007-2008 financial meltdown.

An eruption of class struggle is no less inevitable in Australia. From Egypt to America to Australia, real change for the working class will not come through the existing political establishment—whether it takes the form of repressive dictatorships in the Middle East, or the worm-eaten parliamentary regimes in the so-called "democracies"—but only through the direct intervention of masses of ordinary workers and youth into the political arena. An independent political movement of the working class must be developed that will bring to power a workers' government, committed to reorganising economic and social life on the basis of social need, not private profit. The SEP is seeking to build and prepare the revolutionary party necessary to lead this struggle.

Labor's record in government

For three decades, successive Labor and Liberal governments at both federal and state levels have imposed a free market agenda of deregulation, privatisation and tax cuts for companies and the wealthy. The vast bulk of the population has suffered steadily eroding living standards and working conditions, mounting financial stress, and declining access to essential services and infrastructure. Today, some 3.4 million Australians live in households with an income of less than $400 per week—more than 15 percent of the population.

In stark contrast, the banks and mining conglomerates are registering multi-billion dollar profits, which flow to a small layer of super-rich. In 2009, some 173,000 Australian millionaires controlled wealth of close to $600 billion—not including their homes. Over the past year, the wealthiest 40 individuals increased their combined fortunes by 40 percent, to a staggering $68.4 billion. Mining magnate Gina Rinehart alone increased her personal wealth by $7 billion.

Prime Minister Julia Gillard's minority Labor government has pledged to meet the demands of the financial markets for a budget surplus, lower corporate taxes and higher profits, thus ensuring even greater social inequality. Behind these demands lie fears that the mounting economic contradictions in China will trigger another round of global financial turmoil and bring the so-called "mining boom" to a rapid end.

Gillard is preparing budget cutbacks that will drive hundreds of thousands of the ill, disabled, destitute and disadvantaged off welfare and force them into cheap labour, pushing wages and conditions down to the levels being imposed in the US and Europe, and which already prevail throughout Asia. She is also targeting spending on public education and health, in collaboration with the state governments and trade unions, and meeting corporate demands for a price on carbon, which will double average household power costs by 2013.

It was this agenda that motivated the ousting of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd last June. The political coup that brought Gillard to power had two fundamental aims: to effect a shift from stimulus spending to austerity; and to align Australia even more closely with the global strategic and militarist agenda of Washington.

Labor in NSW

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The NSW state election is an anti-democratic fraud. Regardless of which of the major parties wins, it will obey the instructions of big business and work with the Gillard government to inflict sweeping cutbacks to social spending.

The NSW Labor government epitomises the transformation of the ALP from a party that once advocated the reform of society to meet certain immediate needs of the working class, into the naked instrument of big business and the super-rich. For 16 years, it has served as nothing but the agent of the investment banks, property developers and construction companies that operate from the business precincts of "Global Sydney". Roads, rail links, the water supply, hospitals and health services and now the electricity retailers have been handed over via public-private partnerships for investors to gouge out profits.

Labor's policies—at both state and federal level—have flowed inexorably from its defence of the private-profit and nation-state system. Over the past three decades, the globalisation of every aspect of economic life has seen corporations shift production to wherever they could take advantage of cheaper labor and raw materials and rake in the highest rates of return. The very foundations of nationally regulated economies, through tariff protection and other controls, have been totally shattered.

From 1983 to 1996, the Hawke and Keating Labor governments responded to these changes, like their counterparts overseas—such as Thatcher in the UK, and Reagan in the US—by initiating a wholesale free-market restructuring of the economy. With the full support of the unions, real wages and working conditions were slashed in order to attract globally-mobile capital for investment and to advance the "international competitiveness" of Australian-based companies. State governments mirrored the federal agenda by competing with each other to provide the most attractive options for business investment.

A quarter of a century on, the Labor Party is no longer a political party in any real sense. It has severed every connection it once had to working class communities and become the transmission-belt into government of various corporate interests, as well as a vehicle for the lucrative career advancement and self-enrichment of Labor politicians.

One of the NSW party's key powerbrokers, Eddie Obeid, for example, announced, on the eve of the election, his family's intending purchase of an $8.5 million harbourside mansion. Ben Keneally, husband of current premier Kristina Keneally, moved from a $250,000 position advising former Premier Bob Carr into a highly-paid executive post with electric car infrastructure company Better Place Australia. For taking the job, he was awarded a $1 million share-holding. Questions were raised last year over possible conflict of interest, since the company could benefit from government contracts to install electric car parking stations in his wife's pet project, the huge multi-billion dollar development at Sydney harbour's Barangaroo. Carr himself continues to earn hundreds of thousands of dollars a year as an advisor to investment house, Macquarie Bank, which has been a major beneficiary of his government's private-public partnerships.

The trade unions have likewise been transformed. Whereas they once pressured employers for improvements to workers' wages and conditions, they now pressure workers to sacrifice jobs and conditions in the name of corporate competitiveness and the "national interest"—that is, the interests of the ruling elite. Over the past three decades, they have systematically sabotaged, isolated and betrayed countless strikes and struggles, and now preside over a small fraction of the workforces they used to represent.

Today, the unions function as an industrial police force on behalf of the major corporations, assisting them in implementing the continuous restructuring of their operations to conform to ever-more stringent benchmarks of productivity and profitability. They endorse Gillard's Fair Work Australia regime, which makes most industrial action illegal, and victimise and blackguard workers who refuse to comply. Union bureaucrats sit on superannuation fund boards, managing billions of dollars in investment funds, with a direct incentive to cut corporate taxes and suppress workers' living standards.

All the while, the immense social needs of workers in urban, regional and rural communities alike have been ignored, with vital infrastructure allowed to decay. Labor's legacy in NSW is a crisis-stricken public health and education system, notoriously dysfunctional public transport and roads, spiraling housing, energy and water costs and unprecedented levels of poverty and distress.

In western Sydney, official unemployment hovers around 10 percent. Tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs have been destroyed, while hundreds of thousands of workers are condemned to work on a contract, casual, temporary or part-time basis, unable to earn enough to make ends meet.

The Labor government's response to the escalating hardship facing millions of ordinary workers and youth, and the consequent rise in social tensions, has been to whip up law-and-order campaigns and anti-immigrant hysteria, in order to create scapegoats for the social crisis that its own policies have produced. Muslim communities in Sydney's south-western suburbs have been particularly targeted for vilification. The police have been given draconian new powers and increased numbers to maintain a constant campaign of harassment and intimidation against Muslim and other working class youth.

So despised has the NSW Labor Party become, that its backers in the corporate and media world have largely abandoned it, considering it a squeezed lemon, incapable of further serving their interests. They have been joined by twenty-two Labor members of parliament and a bevy of advisors and hangers-on, who have resigned in advance of the election in favour of more advantageous opportunities. Keneally herself recently declared that in her opinion, the continued existence of the Labor Party in NSW was "not a given".

While the Liberal and National parties, led by opposition leader Barry O'Farrell, have said virtually nothing about their post-election policies, a conservative coalition will embrace Labor's pro-big business agenda. A *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial on February 13 encouraged the next government to privatise the Sydney desalination plant, the Sydney ferry service, ports, rail lines and roads, as well as what remains of state-owned electricity generation and distribution. Tens of thousands of jobs will be destroyed.

Former Victorian Liberal premier, Jeff Kennett, has publicly advised O'Farrell to unleash an avalanche of "reforms" to the NSW public sector—just as Kennett did in Victoria—leading to the closure of scores of schools and hospitals.

An O'Farrell government will also continue Labor's law-and-order and anti-immigrant witch-hunting. The ranks of the NSW Liberal Party are full of extreme-right elements, such as the state party's former director, now federal opposition immigration spokesman, Scott Morrison. Morrison recently advised the federal Liberals to begin a national anti-Muslim

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campaign in order to build a social base among the most backward and right wing social layers for his party's reactionary and regressive agenda.

The Greens offer no alternative. They champion the reactionary demand for population control and insist ordinary people pay for the environmental disaster produced by the anarchy of the private profit system—a system they support and defend. The Greens' program expresses the interests of a layer of the affluent middle class, preoccupied with enhancing its own lifestyle, and utterly indifferent to the conditions and problems facing masses of workers. 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. In Tasmania, the state Labor-Green coalition government has already announced $340 million in budget cuts that will lead to one in 10 public servants being sacked.

The Greens are not opponents of US-led militarism and war. They have criticised the Afghan and Iraq wars on the basis that Australian troops should be used for neo-colonial operations that directly serve the geo-strategic and financial interests of Australian capitalism in the Asia-Pacific region—regarded by Canberra as its own "sphere of influence"—such as the military occupations of East Timor and the Solomon Islands.

The social rights of the working class

The Socialist Equality Party fights for the independent interests of the working class. Against the dictates of the financial and corporate elite, and their political servants in the official parliamentary establishment, the SEP insists that every person has fundamental social rights.

These include:

* ***Full-time, well paid employment. A living wage for all***

Every person capable of work must be guaranteed a full-time job that provides holiday, sick, parental, long-service and retraining leave, access to free child care facilities for working parents, and strictly enforced workplace safety. Billions of dollars must be immediately allocated to a massive emergency public works initiative, providing jobs and training, especially to the youth. To allow workers to participate in political, social and cultural life, the working week must be reduced to 30 hours, with no loss of pay. The temporarily unemployed, the disabled, stay-at-home parents, carers and the retired must be paid a living income that enables them to fully participate in society.

**** Decent and affordable housing***

A large-scale, publicly-funded program of rational and environmentally-sound housing construction must be undertaken to end the shortage created by the banks and property developers as they push home prices out of reach of working class families. Repossessions must be outlawed and mortgages compulsorily renegotiated to affordable levels.

Electricity, gas, water and telephone and internet services must be provided to every household as a basic right. The necessary investment must be made to ensure every community, urban and rural, has access to high-speed internet.

* ***Free, high quality health and dental care***

High-quality health and dental care is an essential social right in modern society, which must be guaranteed free to all. Instead, a two-class health system has been created, in which the wealthy can access treatments and technologies with ease, while thousands of working class people languish on public hospital waiting lists or go without treatment altogether.

Billions of dollars must be made available to upgrade public facilities, construct new ones, and train and employ thousands more doctors, dentists, nurses and paramedics.

A political and industrial campaign by health workers and the working class as a whole should be developed to stop the implementation of the "National Health Care Plan" of the federal and state governments. The plan will result in the imposition of market-based case-mix funding, lead to cutbacks to already struggling public hospitals and the further privatisation of medical services.

* ***Free public education at all levels***

Every child must be guaranteed a high quality, free education from pre-school to university, which enables them to maximise their intellectual, physical and creative potential. Resources must be poured into school renovation and construction, the employment of teachers and reduction of class sizes, the purchase of technologies and teaching aids, and the development of all-rounded curricula. All tertiary level students must be paid a living income that enables them to dedicate their time to study and personal development, and every campus provided with the resources necessary to establish functioning student clubs, newspapers and creative and sporting activities.

Teachers and parents should implement a total ban on the NAPLAN performance testing regime, which is modeled on schemes in the US and Britain that have led to the closure or privatisation of hundreds of so-called "failing" schools and the transformation of curricula into little more than learning by rote.

**** High quality public transport***

An emergency public works program must be launched to overcome the crisis of public transport, particularly in Sydney. Numerous plans have been drawn up by experts, calling for new rail lines, light rail and improved bus services. The resources have simply not been made available to implement them. The result is the daily traffic gridlocks that plague the lives of millions of Sydney residents.

New publicly-owned airports must be constructed away from the densely-populated areas of inner Sydney and linked by fast train to the city, regional centres and other states.

**** Access to culture and the arts***

Funds must be poured into the arts and culture to provide all working people access to theatres, orchestras, cinemas, museums, libraries, public television and radio, and art and music education free of charge or at a nominal fee.

**** Full democratic rights***

Social inequality is incompatible with genuine democracy. Behind the façade of parliament, federal and state governments have introduced a raft

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of laws that can be used to engage in rampant spying on the population, criminalise political opposition, illegalise strikes, suppress demonstrations and censor the internet. All such laws, such as the Anti-Terrorism legislation and Labor's Fair Work Australia Act, must be abolished. All spy agencies, including ASIO and ASIS, must be closed down. The armed forces and police forces—which around the world are being used to suppress the working class—must be disbanded.

All discrimination based on nationality, ethnic background, religion, gender or sexual preference must be outlawed. Women must have the right to unrestricted abortion on demand, and homosexuals the right to marry and enjoy the same rights and benefits as other married couples.

**** A safe environment***

The threat of climate change arising from carbon emissions must be answered with a coordinated global program of investment into alternatives to carbon-based fuels. There is no national solution to the problem. The working class is not responsible for the crisis and should not pay for it. All forms of market-based carbon pricing and emissions trading schemes that shift the burden of restructuring energy generation onto ordinary people must be opposed.

Independent investigations by qualified scientists must be conducted where communities fear they are at risk of contamination by industrial pollution or toxic waste, such as the suburbs of Wollongong.

The recent flood disasters in Queensland and regional NSW have exposed once again the criminal indifference of governments toward safe urban development and building codes. Homes have been constructed in areas or with methods that ensured they would be inundated. An independent investigation must take place in every community to determine the risks to life and property—whether from floods, fire, earthquakes or cyclones—and the necessary measures taken to prevent them.

For the expropriation of the banks and major corporations. For public ownership and democratic control

None of these social rights will be achieved as long as the means of production are privately owned and the existing political setup remains. Under the current economic and social order, every aspect of life is subordinated to the private pursuit and accumulation of profit. What is required is a workers' government—a government of, for and by the working class—which will carry out the socialist reorganisation of society.

The vast productive capacities, resources and technology that exist on a world scale must be harnessed to ensure that the social rights of every man, woman and child are guaranteed. The productive forces, however, must first be liberated from the control of the financial and corporate elite. The banks and financial institutions must be expropriated, with full protection to small depositors, and placed under public ownership and democratic control by the working class. Likewise the major, multi-billion dollar corporations must be taken out of private hands, with compensation to small shareholders, and placed under public ownership and democratic oversight.

For the political independence of the working class

The implementation of such a program requires that the working class makes a decisive political break from the old Labor and trade union apparatuses. Pseudo-left tendencies such as Socialist Alliance repeatedly claim they can be pressured to the "left" or that Labor is at least a "lesser evil" to the conservative Liberal-National parties. The truth is that Labor and the unions do not represent the working class in any way. Those who claim they do, are trying to blind workers to the necessity of making a complete break with these nationalist, pro-capitalist organisations.

The SEP advocates a political rebellion against Labor and the trade unions. The working class must establish its political independence through the establishment of new organisations, including rank-and-file workplace and community-based committees, whose aim must be to unite every section of the working class in a common struggle against the capitalist system itself, based on a socialist and internationalist perspective:

*** For the international unity of the working class**

The economic, social and environmental crisis facing society, along with the dangers of war, arise from the contradictions and failure of the world capitalist system. There is no national solution. The working class must unite internationally on the perspective of establishing a world planned socialist economy that is rationally and democratically organised to meet the needs of the entire world's population.

In striving for the international unity of the working class, workers must oppose every form of nationalism, discrimination and racism, particularly the persecution of immigrants and refugees, and uphold the right of all workers to live wherever they wish, with full citizenship rights.

*** Against militarism and war**

The invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the danger of war in numerous flashpoints around the world, stems from the mounting rivalry between the major capitalist powers for domination over spheres of influence, resources, markets and profits. The exposure by WikiLeaks of Labor Party leaders and US officials openly discussing the possibility of war with China is a warning of how advanced the strategic rivalries and tensions have become.

If the working class internationally is not to be dragged into an abyss even greater than the world wars of the twentieth century, it must unite against every expression of militarism, nationalism and patriotism.

All Australian and other occupying troops must be immediately withdrawn from Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor, the Solomon Islands and wherever else they are stationed. Compensation must be paid to the victims of colonial aggression, and all those responsible for war crimes prosecuted. The ANZUS alliance with the United States and other imperialist alliances must be repudiated and all military bases in Australia closed down.

Build the Socialist Equality Party

We urge all voters who agree with this program in the seats where SEP candidates are standing to vote "1" for our candidates. Our candidates will not be identified as members of the Socialist Equality Party on the ballot papers due to the anti-democratic state electoral laws that place major obstacles in the path of parties seeking to obtain registration.

The SEP candidate in **Auburn** is Carolyn Kennett, 47, a former nurse and now mathematics lecturer who has fought against the union's complicity in the restructuring of university workers' conditions. In **Bankstown**, the SEP will be represented by Richard Phillips, 62, a life-long socialist and regular contributor to the *World Socialist Web Site*. In **Marrickville**, the SEP is standing James Cogan, 41, the party's national

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organiser and a regular correspondent of the WSWS. In **Newcastle**, Noel Holt, 62, a retired Telstra worker, will represent the SEP. All four stood as SEP candidates in the same areas in last year's August federal election.

At the centre of the SEP campaign will be the analysis and commentary published each day by the *World Socialist Web Site*, www.wsws.org, the most widely read socialist publication on the internet. The WSWS will provide coverage of the SEP's campaign and the major political issues in the NSW election. Most importantly, it provides continuous analysis of major world events and the struggles of the international working class, along with ongoing commentary on the vital issues of political perspective and program that are now emerging throughout the globe.

Above all, we call on workers and youth to join and build the Socialist Equality Party, the Australian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), as the mass revolutionary party and political leadership of the working class.

The SEP's perspective and principles are based on the strategic lessons of the twentieth century and the entire theoretical and historical heritage of Marxism, defended by Leon Trotsky against the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union and the betrayal of the program of world socialist revolution by the parasitic and bureaucratic regime headed by Joseph Stalin.

In the wake of the demise of the Stalinist regimes in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe two decades ago, apologists for the capitalist market hailed it as final proof that the class struggle, socialism and Marxism were irrelevant in the modern world. Now, the Stalinist collapse stands as the prelude to the failure of all the structures and institutions of world capitalism. The international working class is re-entering political struggle in powerful demonstrations of its social power and revolutionary capacities to remake the world. The task at hand is the construction of the international party and leadership that can lead it to victory.

The SEP encourages all those who agree with our perspective of world socialism to actively participate in our election campaign, become regular readers of the *World Socialist Web Site*, attend our public meetings and help distribute our election material as widely as possible. Above all, we urge you to join and build the Socialist Equality Party.

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To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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