

SEP election meeting in Sydney's Penrith area

## The NBN asbestos exposures: The case for socialist planning

19 June 2013

Residents of Sydney's outer working-class suburb of Penrith last month revealed that work by Telstra sub-contractors associated with the National Broadband Network (NBN) had resulted in their families—and the workers involved—being exposed to cancer-causing asbestos-containing material. Other incidents of asbestos “mishandling” during NBN work have since been reported around the country.

This situation is scandalous. Thousands of workers have died or are cancer-stricken from previous cases of asbestos exposure, and the presence of the material in telecommunications infrastructure is well known. Yet Telstra, NBN Corporation, the Gillard Labor government, state and local government authorities, and the trade unions, have allowed the broadband roll-out to take place without the necessary safeguards for the health of workers and residents. The overriding priority has been to meet the demands of the corporate establishment to install the network as quickly and cheaply as possible.

The exposures only became known because Penrith resident Matthew O'Farrell took a stand and demanded answers about the work being carried out in his street. Until then, there had been a conspiracy of silence surrounding the unsafe handling of asbestos in the NBN rollout.

Every defender of the capitalist profit system claims that the “market” is the most efficient and rational means of organising the economy and allocating society's resources. In reality, millions of people around the world pay the price every day for the anarchic and unplanned character of capitalism, and its subordination of every aspect of social life to private profit.

Today, under conditions of the greatest economic

crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the ruling elites internationally are making deep inroads into all the past gains of the working class. Every aspect of life, from jobs and wages to health care and education, is under attack. Basic health and safety measures are being eroded or destroyed to satisfy corporate demands for profit. As a result, there is a growing list of disasters, from the exposure of communities to dangerous substances, oil spills and the meltdown of nuclear power plants to deadly mine explosions, building collapses and fires.

The only answer to the accelerating drive for austerity at the expense of the working class is the rational socialist planning of economic and social life, within Australia and around the world, to meet the social needs of humanity as a whole. What is required is an independent, political movement of the working class, dedicated to the establishment of a workers' government based on socialist policies. The banks and major corporations must be placed under public ownership and democratic control. Only in this way can essential services such as high-speed Internet be constructed with the maximum regard for public health and safety and made freely available to all.

Socialist Equality Party candidates for the 2013 election will explain at this Sunday's meeting the party's socialist and internationalist perspective to put an end to the catastrophes produced by capitalism. We urge workers and young people to attend to discuss these vital issues.

### SEP Election Meeting

Sunday, June 23, 2 p.m.

Kingswood Neighbourhood Centre  
19 Bringelly Road, Kingswood

Tickets: \$3/\$2 concession

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To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**