

*For the millions, not the millionaires*

# Socialist Campaigner

**WE SAY**

- ▶ End the occupation of Iraq - Troops out now
- ▶ Money for Medicare & education, not detention & war
- ▶ Hands off the unions

National newsletter of the Socialist Alliance, Number 5, November/December 2003 **DONATION \$1**

## Re-building the anti-war movement

BY LUKE DEER AND PIP HINMAN

### NATIONAL ANTI-WAR STEERING COMMITTEE

Between October 22 and 25, more than 10,000 people demonstrated across the country against the visit to Australia by President George Bush. In Sydney, 5000 people protested; in Canberra 4000; in Melbourne 1200; in Perth 400; in Adelaide 300; in Brisbane 200; in Hobart 200; in Darwin 50; in Geelong 50; and in Lismore 60.

Socialist Alliance played a critical role in making sure that these protests went ahead. While the Greens did well inside parliament on October 23, credit should go to Socialist Alliance and those it worked with from local peace groups, Palestinian and other migrant communities, and some left trade unions for taking on the lion's share of organisation for the extra-parliamentary protests.

Socialist Alliance's approach was to use the opportunity provided by the US President's visit to kick-start the anti-war movement after its relative lull since March. The main demands at the protests were for the occupying troops get out of Iraq, and for justice for Palestine. In some cities, they also included opposition to the Free Trade Agreement and an end to the Bush-Howard alliance.

The protests everywhere - but particularly in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne - were lively, colourful and broad. They were marked by a mix of generations and many new faces. Protesters included secondary students, office workers in their suits (some



Canberra rally against Bush, October 23.

of whom eagerly helped out as "peace monitors" in Sydney), older peace activists and families with children.

In all cities, Socialist Alliance's profile at the rallies was arguably the best it's been throughout this extraordinary year of anti-war protests. This, and a new Socialist Alliance leaflet, made it much easier to join new members, and the SA merchandise, including the new "Medicare not Warfare" T-shirts and anti-war stickers, were easy to sell.

Alliance members around the country report that many people made a point of thanking SA for organising the rallies.

Socialist Alliance was either represented directly on many of the rally platforms (Perth, Adelaide, Darwin, Lismore and Geelong), or SA activists represented other organisations (in Sydney, Rihab Charida spoke for Sawiyah: Coalition for Palestine, Kylie Moon for Books not Bombs and Jim Casey for the Fire Brigades Employees Union, and in Perth Sam Wainwright spoke for the Maritime Union of Australia). In many cities, Socialist Alliance members chaired the protests.

Everywhere, the rally platforms were broad, reflecting the spectrum of public opinion which still opposes the war on Iraq and wants the troops out. The platforms included Green, Democrat and ALP MPs, religious leaders, refugee and anti-war activists, academics, unionists and international guests.

In Sydney, the lively and militant 5000-strong protest was the first event to be organised by the new Stop the War Coalition, formed by Socialist Alliance, local peace group activists, some veteran peace activists, left Greens and Friends of the Earth members after the conservatives split from the Sydney Walk Against War coalition in August.

If not for Socialist Alliance and its allies, Bush's visit would have gone unchallenged in the streets. The protests have helped kick-start the movement again after its high point before the war, and have also re-ignited the important discussion about building the movement.

This is a key lesson from the Bush protest. Revitalising, sustaining and building broadly based anti-war networks and groupings is a primary task for the left. The role of Socialist Alliance is not to substitute for the movement locally, but to project a bigger, broad, common socialist profile within the movement as a whole.

This is what we did with considerable success during the Bush visit.

[A more detailed version of this report from SA's anti-war steering committee is available by contacting the national conveners at [ne@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:ne@socialist-alliance.org).]

### 2004 national conference - book now

The date and venue of Socialist Alliance's Third National Conference have now been set. The conference will be held in Melbourne, commencing with a public meeting at Victorian Trades Hall on the evening of Friday May 7, and continue through Saturday May 8 and Sunday May 9.

Flemington Community Centre, the comfortable venue of this year's national conference, has been booked again for 2004.

With firm dates set for the conference, members and supporters can take advantage of the much cheaper travel fares on offer months in advance. So, put in your diaries and book your fares now for the most important gathering of Australian socialists in 2004.

[www.socialist-alliance.org](http://www.socialist-alliance.org)

# NSW conference: Regime change begins at home

BY MELANIE SJOBERG  
NSW COORDINATING COMMITTEE

A resoundingly successful NSW State conference held in Sydney on November 8 brought together more than 110 members and supporters of Socialist Alliance to share ideas for election work, exchange experiences about branch building and consider future campaigns.

A diversity of workshops offered political education, about struggles for women's liberation, the history of red unions and Latin America; discussion of practical questions, such as how to start a new SA branch and socialist election campaigning; and an opportunity for members to discuss the issue of a Socialist Alliance newspaper.

Most participants arrived early to hear radical historian and SA member Humphrey McQueen, and former Alliance national convener Dick Nichols, present "the case for socialism".

## Have your say in *Alliance Voices*

The Socialist Alliance produces a national internal discussion bulletin for members to present and debate their ideas on theoretical, policy, campaigning and organisational questions, and to communicate important resolutions passed by the national executive and other information relevant to all branches and members.

*Alliances Voices*, can be downloaded from SA's web site, or you can obtain hard copies from your local branch.

Volume 3 Number 11, produced at the beginning of November, contains, among other things, articles on socialist election campaigning, Cuba, finances, and "Third Worldism". The next issue will be published around the end of November.

If you are thinking about making a contribution to the bulletin, don't hold back. Other members would like to know what you think, and every individual's idea contributes to a richer and more useful discussion in the Alliance.

Contributions should be emailed to the national conveners at [ne@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:ne@socialist-alliance.org) or posted to PO Box A2323, Sydney South 1235.

Humphrey described the value of creativity and imagination for understanding how the world can be different, and outlined his ideas on themes for a book introducing socialism that he is currently drafting for the Alliance.

Dick, who has recently returned from three months in Europe and Latin America, outlined the inspiring developments in Scotland, and in the left unity process in Europe, emphasising that SA in Australia can learn much from studying of these developments, but that we also have much to contribute to the discussion internationally.

Brian Webb and Melanie Sjoberg from Eastern Sydney branch presented an overview of the Australian political situation and the state committee's assessment of Socialist Alliance activity in the anti-war movement and in the trade unions. Brian emphasised the opportunities for continuing to build the anti-war movement and the need to fight Howard's racism following his move to excise more islands from Australian territory in order to bar asylum seekers from Australia.

Melanie described the signs of resistance amongst trade unionists in NSW, despite the declining membership numbers and growing insecurity of employment. Alliance members were at the heart of building the recent National Tertiary Education Union strike and the NSW Teachers Federation actions for improved pay and class sizes. SA members are also leading the NSW public sector campaign against 1000 job cuts in education and TAFE, and are actively campaigning for more militant action to defend jobs and conditions in the manufacturing and construction industries.

NSW co-convenor Paul Benedek and Newcastle branch member Jane Beckmann presented reports on how Socialist Alliance is developing in NSW and election campaign opportunities here.

Paul announced that a new SA branch has just been formed in Taree, making 11 across NSW, and outlined the continuing growth of these branches. "The growing number of branches and interest in socialist ideas shows that we should be extremely ambitious when we are planning the next election campaign", he said. "We can now experiment in local government elections, and maybe even stand a Palestinian activist for the Sydney Lord Mayor". Sydney's current Lord Mayor gained nationwide notoriety this month when she refused to attend the awarding of the Sydney Peace Prize to Palestinian human rights activist Hanan Ashrawi.



Humphrey McQueen (above) and Melanie Sjoberg.



Jane's account of Newcastle SA members role in fighting the NSW government's plan to cut the rail link to many country areas inspired us all. The high level of anger about the issue laid the basis for a serious local government campaign by the Alliance, she said. Newcastle SA branch member Geoff Payne was recently elected chairperson of the broad community-based Save Our Rail Campaign committee.

The conference also elected two candidates for the NSW Senate ticket in the federal election. They are Kylie Moon, coordinator of Books Not Bombs, the group that led the high-school student protests against the war on Iraq, and John Morris, a high-school teacher and well-known unionist on the NSW Teachers Federation Council, and an activist in the Marrickville Peace Group.

Branches around NSW are now in the process of pre-selecting local candidates. In Auburn, in Sydney's western suburbs, the branch has pre-selected SA national co-convenor Lisa Macdonald to stand for the seat of Reid.

# Seeing Red

BY LISA MACDONALD  
NATIONAL CO-CONVENER

Work is now well under way on the first issue of *Seeing Red*, Socialist Alliance's new quarterly magazine. It promises to be engaging, humorous, informative, educational and controversial – all in just 40 pages!

A sneak preview of the contents commissioned for the first issue reveals:

(i) Feature articles on Howard's agenda for women, the anti-war movement, the PC/culture wars, corporate welfare, Labor's "alternative" in the Latham era, Medicare and "wellness", privatisation of water and the debate about restorative justice

(ii) "Behind the headlines" comment pieces on capital punishment, refugee deportations, aged care today compared to the 1950s, information technol-

ogy, history spots and "quotations from the enemy"

(iii) An indigenous issues section including critiques of the Noel Pearson agenda and Germaine Greer's latest "indigenous spirituality" theory

(iv) A roundtable on prospects for resistance compiling talks from Jura Books' Workers Control conference

(v) A labour history column on the fight for the 40-hour week

(vi) A "State of the union" piece on current industrial issues

(vii) A science column on the non-science of biological determinism

(viii) Cultural review articles on Michael Franti's music; books on Islam (Maxine Rodinson), and militarism in US schools; film commentary; and a piece on Cibachrome art

(ix) Four pages of letters to the editor

(x) A "Letter from abroad" from a PNG activist on Australia as Big Brother

... and more.



The *Seeing Red* editorial board includes SA members: Humphrey McQueen, Marxist historian and writer; Alastair Greig, Reader in Sociology, ANU; Rob White, Professor of Criminology, Uni of Tasmania; Rosemary Webb, labour historian at Southern Cross Uni, Lismore; Dick Bryan, Political Economy, Sydney Uni; and David Glanz and Dick Nichols for the SA national executive.

As the editorial board members began networking to solicit

ideas and articles for the first issue, it quickly became clear that *Seeing Red* will fill a big gap in left publishing in this country. The response from a very wide spectrum of people – in academia, the social movements and a range of NGOs – has been extremely enthusiastic.

The plan is to print the first issue in early February, and organise big public launches in every city and town we can.

Alliance members and supporters who would like to contribute an article, poem, cartoon or illustration, letter, or anything else that would strengthen *Seeing Red* as a broad forum for political, social and cultural dissent, can contact the editorial board through the SA national conveners at [ne@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:ne@socialist-alliance.org)

Ideas for and offers of assistance in distributing the magazine, especially outside the major cities, would also be very welcome.

## WA campaign caucuses formed

BY NIKKI ULASOWSKI  
PERTH DISTRICT COMMITTEE

Sixty Alliance members and others checking SA out for the first time attended the Western Australian Socialist Alliance education and decision making conference on October 12.

Held over six hours on a Sunday afternoon, the conference included two plenary sessions, the first one opening the day's discussion with a wide-ranging dialogue on globalisation, and the second dealing with the Alliance's party building and campaigning work.

Workshops spread over the afternoon provided a framework for members to discuss the issues of free trade, Palestine, attacks on workers' rights, political trends in Latin America and Australia's imperialist role in the Asia-Pacific region, among others.

In his opening speech on globalisation, Barry Healy, co-convenor of the new Perth Hills branch, commented: "Our lives are dominated by permanent insecurity and dissatisfaction", which explains "why there is a deeply felt resentment against the current capitalist order that shows sometimes as anti-globalisation demo's, sometimes as an anti-war movement, but always as a feeling that something is basically wrong around the world and there just must be a better way".

The conference noted the successes so far of both the work we're doing to expand the Alliance's outreach and the leadership of SA activists in various campaigns.

Members voted to form four statewide caucuses to facilitate the co-ordination of Socialist Alliance's work in the campaign areas of trade unions, anti-war, education and refugee

rights. These caucuses are open to any SA member in WA who is involved in the area of work.

The conference also voted to take some concrete steps forward in the federal election campaign work before the end of the year, to support the SIEV-X refugee rights and anti-war "Stop Bush" protest, and elected a new state executive.

## Persistence pays off

BY RON BAILEY  
TAREE BRANCH

After two years of consistent effort and perseverance, a branch of the Socialist Alliance has been formed in Taree, north of Newcastle in NSW. The meeting to form the branch was held in the suburb of Chatham on November 2.

The branch has seven members. The election of

office bearers was put on notice for our next meeting, to be held on November 30.

The meeting discussed standing me as a candidate in the March 2004 local council elections, and talked about the policies and issues we should campaign on. We also discussed how to build the branch, and planned a video night and social for November 23.

# Election campaign boosted by anti-racism rally

BY RAY FULCHER AND LINDA WALDRON  
MELBOURNE WEST BRANCH

In late October, a Socialist Alliance supporter contacted Melbourne West branch to ask if we would be interested in helping a group of young people from the local African communities who wanted to hold a protest against police racism in the western suburbs. We leapt at the chance.

We met on a Sunday afternoon with about eight young men from the Somali and other African communities who described the constant police harassment of young people from non-Anglo backgrounds in the western suburbs. From being called "Osama" and "terrorist", to being taken to the Footscray police station and beaten, they had experienced it all and were fed up. They weren't prepared to take it anymore and had decided to stand up and resist.

These young people had approached the ombudsman about the problem, but soon realised that nothing would be done unless they campaigned politically - took their

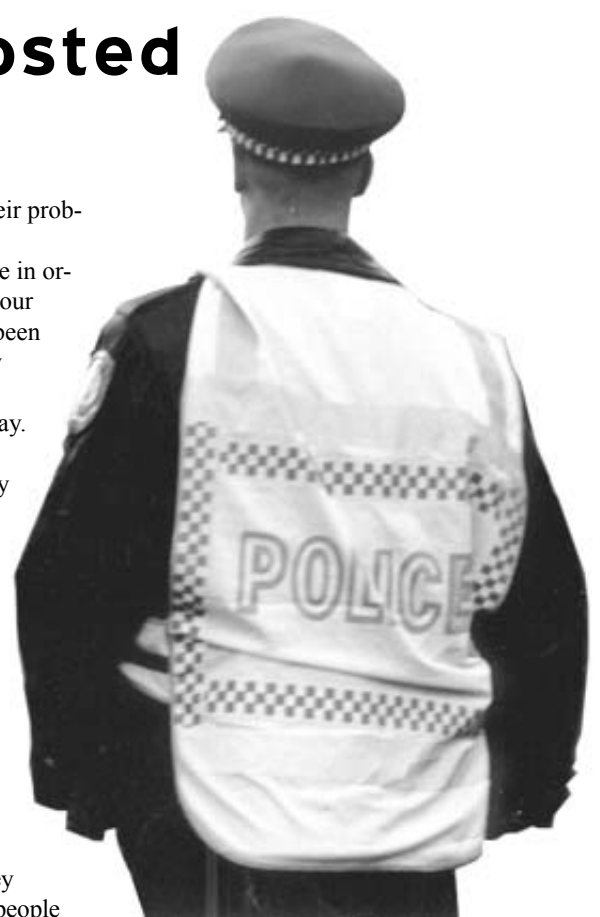
concerns to the street and made their problem public.

None of them had any experience in organising protests and they wanted our help. We readily agreed and have been meeting with the young men every Sunday to plan a protest action for Saturday, November 22 in Footscray. This organising group now has the name Western Suburbs Community Coalition Against Racism, and the rally is endorsed by the CFMEU construction division, the Somali Community of Victoria and Socialist Alliance. It is Ramadan and the young men have been building the protest at every mosque in the west, as well as on the three local radios that service the communities.

We arranged to do a local paste-up on November. SA promised to provide 10 people and they said they could also bring 10. In the end, 40 people turned up and Melbourne's western suburbs received the biggest paste-up in years. Only Ramadan commitments as the sun started to rise ended the collective fun.

The plan for the rally is to gather in Footscray mall, hear some speakers, then march to the Footscray police station. The SA member doing police liaison was told by Footscray police: "We will not tolerate a protest outside the police station" - there is some work to be done.

This community is very unimpressed with the lack of support they received from the



ALP politicians they initially approached. The fact that SA is likely to build support among the thousands of African Muslims living in Melbourne's inner west was evident when two of the young men, who were in the office designing a leaflet, picked up the Sydney SA flags and said, "For the millions, not the millionaires. Great!". They then started inspecting the Gellibrand electorate map up on the wall and said: "We are all voting for you, because you helped us".

## Come visit us!

Since the SA national executive decided in September to locate the Socialist Alliance national office in a space provided by the DSP at 23 Abercrombie Street in Sydney, national co-convenor Michael Morphet has been working hard to transform what was a "well-worn" office into a bright, welcoming and functional office for the Alliance.

Michael has painted the walls, installed new lights, secured a multitude of loose wires, and laid new carpet. We've scrounged some good desks, shelves, filing cabinets and a lounge from other parts of the building, and are getting new signs organised to raise SA's profile on Abercrombie Street.

So, if you live in Sydney, or are just passing through, please drop in and say hello. There's always an Alliance member here to catch up with, and plenty to do if you want to give us a hand!

The office address is: 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, 23 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale (just 5 minute walk from Central Station).

## Victorian unionists getting organised

BY JUDY MCVEY

About 20 Socialist Alliance trade unionists met to plan cross-union activity and solidarity in Melbourne last month. It was the first meeting of SA members in unions, and gets us off to a good start. The newly formed Victorian Trade Union Steering Committee (TUSC) hopes to call similar meetings about five times a year to share organising experiences.

We discussed starting to build a network around SA members by using the new SA pamphlet, *Dare to Struggle - Dare to Win*. Members took copies to sell at work and will report back on how the arguments went down.

The meeting also discussed motions on campaigning to defend Medicare, support for the NTEU strike and getting union support for the anti-Bush protests in Canberra and Melbourne. NTEU members had already won support for a donation for the buses to Canberra.

All unions where we have members are supporting the campaign to save Medicare, so this gives us a focus everywhere. We decided to support the VTHC rally around Medicare, education and attacks on unions, held on November 11.

Two more people have now joined the TUSC, which will organise regular meetings and seminars for trade unionists in the future.

If SA members in unions in Victoria would like to get involved, phone Judy McVey on 0418 347 374, or email [victoria@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:victoria@socialist-alliance.org)

# National election campaign committee established

A 2003 federal election is now off the cards and we can all breathe a sigh of relief ... even if we are eagerly looking forward to seeing Howard out as soon as possible. The extra months (it could be less than 3 or as many as 12) to get the Alliance's election campaign up and running means that we can be more ambitious, organised and effective in our campaigning.

Some branches have already pre-selected local House of Rep candidates, and a number of states will be pre-selecting Senate tickets before the end of the year (stay tuned for a full list in the next issue of *Socialist Campaigner*).

Meanwhile, discussion is flourishing across the Alliance membership about what sort of campaign we can and should run. What are the main aims of the campaign? What are the key issues to focus on? How do we link the issues together, and to socialist solutions? What campaigning methods work best for us? What types of propaganda will be most useful? How can we use the election campaign to get more detailed SA policy positions finalised?

In some states, the federal election will probably now fall after state and/or local gov-

ernment elections, posing the question for many branches of how SA can use these as springboards for a more effective federal campaign. As new Socialist Alliance branches continue to form and existing branches grow stronger, local government election campaigns are looking increasingly attractive – and worthwhile – avenues for raising the socialist flag.

In late September, a SA national executive discussion about the federal elections produced some initial concrete ideas about campaign slogans, demands and materials. The NE agreed that to run a serious campaign we needed to establish a national election campaign steering committee to work on those ideas, and come up with more, and to coordinate the Alliance's election work nationwide.

The steering committee, which will report regularly to the national executive, will liaise with local branches and state committees, produce election campaign materials, facilitate the development of policy, and so on.

Any Alliance member who would like to join the steering committee, or has some ideas about the election campaign that they'd like to feed in, can get in touch with the committee co-conveners, Brian Webb and Dick Nichols, by emailing [ne@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:ne@socialist-alliance.org)



## Wills pre-selects candidate

BY JUDY MCVEY - WILLS BRANCH

The Wills branch of the Socialist Alliance has pre-selected David Glanz as its candidate in the coming federal election.

We will be campaigning on a platform of "Health and education, not war", making the argument that the Howard government has unlimited funds for the invasion and occupation of Iraq and for imprisoning asylum-seekers. The \$2.4 billion on private health insurance and subsidies for elite private schools should be spent on defending and extending Medicare, providing free public education and safe, genuine jobs.

David has lived in Brunswick for nearly 14 years. He is an active member of the Moreland Peace Group, organised the campaign to save the former Chef factory, and was part of a community protest against overdevelopment in Lygon Street.

He is one of the Socialist Alliance national conveners and played a prominent role in the anti-capitalist protests against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in September 2000. He is also an active delegate with the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance and recently led a successful strike against his employer, a major corporation.

In the 2001 federal election, David gained more than 1000 votes even though SA had not yet been registered and our name was not on the ballot paper.

The campaign will be launched with a fundraising dinner this year. The SA branch was heavily involved in building an anti-war rally in Wills on November 1.

We have lots of ideas for an anti-capitalist-style campaign with lots of interesting public events, but we need more. If you can help, contact David Glanz on 0418 316 310.



## Another Brisbane branch launched

BY MICHAEL McDONALD AND  
LYNDA HANSEN  
BRISBANE SOUTH BRANCH

On September 25, a meeting of 13 Socialist Alliance members voted to form a Brisbane South branch of SA.

Addressing the meeting, Indigenous leader and SA member Sam Watson reflected on his experiences of running on the SA Senate ticket in the 2001 federal election, and described the Alliance as the real "third force" in Australian politics.

Sam's presentation led to discussion around the possibility of the Alliance running a candidate in the March 2004 Brisbane City Council elections,

for the seat of Dutton Park. We have two Alliance campaigning stalls in Stones Corner and West End, and are set to pioneer a new spot at Buranda.

Our next task, part of our membership drive, is a stall at the popular annual West End Festival in November. We are planning some fun draw cards for the day, like a game of "Pin the tail on the terrorist"!

Branch members have come up with lots of colourful ideas to promote socialist ideas in the southern suburbs. Tapping into local politics will be a challenging and rewarding experience.

# Subiaco mayor supports SA

BY ALEX WHISSON  
PERTH BRANCH

On September 19, Socialist Alliance members in the Subiaco-Shenton Park-Leederville area of Perth held a screening of Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*, the first step in the process of building a Socialist Alliance branch in the Curtin electorate.

Around 40 people were in attendance, many of whom came along as a result of extensive letterboxing in the local area. In the lead-up to the event, comrades also ran several stalls outside a busy Subiaco market, distributing hundreds of flyers advertising the film screening and in the process meeting a number of people interested in Alliance activity.

The highlight of the evening was the attendance of local firebrand, railway worker and socialist mayor of Subiaco, Tony Costa. He gave an impassioned speech attacking the Howard government's proposed changes to industrial relations legislation, which he sees as a local manifestation of capitalist globalisation, the underlying theme of *Roger and Me*.

Costa, a local legend in the Subiaco area, also remarked, "I was an active member of the Labor Party for a long time and found my energies were being wasted, as people like me, working people, were more and more sold out, and that's why I see the Socialist Alliance as an alternative".

Although he is intent on remaining only a sympathiser, Costa has very positive things to say about the Alliance: "The Socialist Alliance is an inclusive organisation that welcomes socialists from a variety of political backgrounds. As the people's mayor and a life-long unionist with no love for the Labor Party, I congratulate the Socialist

Alliance on hosting its inaugural event in Subiaco. I hope there are many more events like it in the future."

Everyone came away from the night with a sense that the sky is the limit for socialism in the suburbs.

The Socialist Alliance in Western Australia is currently undertaking an ambitious outreach program in a number of suburban areas. In the Swan hills a branch has recently been established, and in Victoria Park a successful film night at the end of September re-launched the Alliance into the south eastern suburbs. Our success to date can be put down to enthusiasm, persistence and letterboxing, letterboxing, letterboxing!



Subiaco mayor, Tony Costa.

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## SA member to contest CPSU national election

Socialist Alliance Canberra branch member Andrew Hall is standing, as a Members First candidate, for the position of national president in the Community and Public Sector Union elections being held this month. Members First, the broad rank-and-file network in the CPSU which includes SA members and many others, won up to 33.4% of the vote in May elections for national officers.

The CPSU election has been an important opportunity for SA members to help build a bigger and more national militant network in this union. Alliance members have been raising the questions of how to build a democratic and activist culture within the CPSU, how to win a single public service-wide agreement, how to stop the rampant job cuts (up to 10% in some departments

and widespread in Centrelink) and outsourcing, and how to best defend vital community services such as Medicare and public education.

Andrew is challenging incumbent Mark Gepp, who has a history of sellouts and stifling campaigns, from the 1996 CES closure crisis and 13,000 jobs given up to the last Centrelink certified agreement campaign. Members First is also supporting Robert Chapman for the position of Public Sector and Policy Division Secretary.

The Members First leaflet for Andrew's candidacy lists Members First's campaign commitments, including:

- hand decision-making back to CPSU members through members' meetings
- move towards pattern bargaining across agencies as a first step towards industry-wide bargaining
- actively oppose AWAs to end individual bargaining
- publish full details of the salaries of all paid officials, staff and "lobbyists"
- build campaigns that contrast cuts to the public sector with unlimited funding for war
- actively campaign for a 35-hour week
- campaign to bring privatised and outsourced companies carrying out public services back into the public sector.

All Socialist Alliance members in the CPSU are encouraged to join the Alliance's CPSU e-group by emailing: [andrew-hall@bigpond.com](mailto:andrew-hall@bigpond.com) or phoning Andrew on 0438 624 744. For more information about Members First, visit: [www.users.bigpond.com/membersfirst/](http://www.users.bigpond.com/membersfirst/) The ballot closes on November 27. If you can help with leafleting or other campaign work in your city, please contact your local SA branch.

## "Roasting Howard" dinner

BY RAY FULCHER  
MELBOURNE WEST BRANCH

Our branch's fundraising team organised a great dinner in Footscray on November 8 to kick off Melbourne West branch's election fighting fund so we can "roast Howard" at the next election.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II smiled beatifically down from her 1950s portrait over the fireplace (we hired a heritage-listed scout hall for the event) onto 40 people enjoying a delicious meal, a well-stocked bar, music and lots of political discussion. Workers First members were

there in force, the Geelong SA branch brought along a couple of carloads of members, and everyone pitched in roasting meats and making salads. Music was provided by hooking a sound system up to a branch supporter's MP3 music downloads.

The secret to the success of the event - it raised \$620 for our fund - was to keep it *simple*. You don't need lots of long speeches or costly live musicians - just let socialists loose to eat, drink and chat and they entertain themselves!



# Opportunity knocks

BY GEOFF PAYNE  
NEWCASTLE BRANCH

Last May, my Socialist Alliance branch hosted a public forum titled "Save the rail line to Newcastle". One of the three speakers was from the Rail, Tram and Bus Union. The other two - a Greens rep and Stephen O'Brien from SA - had been involved in the successful defence of the rail line ten years ago when it was planned to be cut by Nick Greiner's Liberal state government. This time the attack on the rail line is being led by the Labor minister for transport Michael Costa.

At the May forum, Stephen said, "The people of Newcastle need to initiate a community campaign around this issue to save the railway line again" - and that is just what has happened.

A meeting called by the Greens local councillor kicked off the campaign about a month after the SA forum. We were not told about the first meeting, but I was able to attend the second one. These meetings brought together an alliance of the ALP, Greens and pensioner associations. No-one was under 50 years old, and the meetings are held at 2pm fortnightly, not a time for day workers.

While there was no disagreement over the campaign slogan to save the existing rail line and services, there was little coherence or direction to the meetings, and no teamwork to carry out the limited tasks decided on.

The point for us socialists is to recognise an opportunity, and take it. Who knows where it may lead? I offered to chair the meetings, which was accepted by the campaign.

Previously, the meeting agendas (circulated by the Greens councillor at the beginning of each meeting) were not even referred to,

but everyone had something to say. Now, when people make suggestions the meeting assigns the jobs to small groups, or agrees to leave that suggestion. All the committee members are becoming focussed, and a team is starting to come together. But they still like meeting in the afternoon.

Our first public meeting in the Newcastle Town Hall attracted an overflow audience of 500. We raised about \$900 from donations and badge sales, and half the attendees put their name on the contact sheets. Heaps of people were still wanting to speak when we had to end the meeting.

The excellent turn up showed that the leafleting of railway stations, the support from the local ALP branches and the debate in the local daily paper had won public opinion to our side. The problem is that other forces are still angling for the developers' dollars.

Jack Munday, in his speech to the meeting, asked where the Newcastle union movement was nowadays? He would have expected the Trades Hall Council to be organising to stop this folly, he said. Jack touched on a key political focus for the campaign - how to put pressure on the Newcastle THC secretary who is represented on the government taskforce assigned the job of cutting the rail line.

Up till now the THC secretary has not answered the campaign's requests for NTHC support. The main rail union is not affili-

## Join and donate securely on-line

Do you want to renew your Socialist Alliance membership, or join for the first time?

Would you like to make a donation to help the Alliance's campaigning?

Well, it's just become a lot easier, and safer.

Socialist Alliance now subscribes to Paymate, a system which allows anyone to make a credit card payment to SA of any amount direct from the Alliance web site.

Paymate is a well-respected company which guarantees that credit card numbers provided on-line are entirely confidential, and therefore secure.

All you have to do is go to [www.socialist-alliance.org](http://www.socialist-alliance.org), click on the "Join" or "Donate" buttons, then follow the instructions for payment from there.

ated to the NTHC (no votes for secretary lost there), but it is affiliated to the NSW Labor Council. The votes may come from unions that stand to gain by developing the rail corridor that runs parallel and close to Newcastle harbour.

The campaign will continue to mobilise the community voice. Fifty-one people turned up for the organising meeting following the public meeting. We have called for a state-wide rally outside NSW Parliament House in Sydney on November 19, and for a march and rally on December 6.

The council elections are due on March 27 and the rail issue is bound to be a key issue. The Newcastle mayor is a prominent opponent of the rail line and the ALP has pre-selected a councillor active in the Save Our Rail Campaign to be its candidate.

The Newcastle Socialist Alliance branch will have an interesting discussion about how to continue to build support for the rail line and build support for socialism during the election campaign. More opportunities are opening up.

## Medicare email discussion list

A Socialist Alliance e-group has been initiated by Canterbury Bankstown branch member Lynn Smith to discuss and help organise SA campaigning against the attacks on Medicare. The details to subscribe and send messages to the e-group are:

Post message: [SA\\_defendmedicare@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SA_defendmedicare@yahoogroups.com)

Subscribe: [SA\\_defendmedicare-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SA_defendmedicare-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

Unsubscribe: [SA\\_defendmedicare-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SA_defendmedicare-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com)

List owner: [SA\\_defendmedicare-owner@yahoogroups.com](mailto:SA_defendmedicare-owner@yahoogroups.com)

