

PRECONFERENCE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The founding conference of the
Socialist Alliance in Australia

Number 5

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**IMPORTANT NOTE: ALL RESOLUTIONS MUST BE WITH THE
NATIONAL CONVENORS BY MIDNIGHT, JULY 31 AT THE LATEST.**

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**Socialist
Alliance**

AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

1. PROPOSED BY SOCIALIST ALLIANCE, ILLAWARRA

[All **bold** references are amendments to the constitution, square brackets indicate explanation.]

Definitions

1. New Section 2 (renumber subsequent sections)

Financial Member – a member of the Socialist Alliance who has paid the membership dues for that year

[The implication of this is to replace all references to “paid-up members” and “eligible members” with “financial members” and remains consistent with section 3.1]

2. Oppressed group – any broadly defined section of the population that suffers discrimination within capitalism based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age and/or disability.

Accountability of Socialist Alliance parliamentarians.

Add to point 2.5 - **All perks and benefits of being a parliamentarian will be made available for campaigning, and used under the direction of the Socialist Alliance National Executive, or relevant district or branch.**

Add a new point (either 2.6 or 9.5) – **Upon being pre-selected, all Socialist Alliance candidates will sign their resignation from parliament. This resignation from parliament will be presented to the Head of State should they not implement democratically decided policy, or resign from the Socialist Alliance.**

Elections within Socialist Alliance

Add 3.6

Financial members may request a secret ballot for any election within the Socialist Alliance.

Branches

6.1

The basic unit of the Socialist Alliance shall be the local branch. A branch shall have at least seven members. Members live in the area covered by the branch, which shall be organised on the basis of **a geographic area ideally related to (but not limited to) federal electorates.**

“Leadership bodies”

4.7

delete reference to “leadership bodies” and replace with **“National Executive”**

4.8

delete reference to “leadership bodies” and replace with **“National Executive, and any national body constituted by the National Conference”**

5.1

delete reference to “leadership bodies” and replace with **“The National Officeholders and National Executive shall be responsible ...”**

[“Leadership bodies” is far too vague a reference, especially when they refer more to the National Executive, the only leadership body mentioned in the constitution]

Other Amendments

7.1

States, **districts** or city-wide regions may choose to have organising committees to coordinate campaigns across branches and to coordinate state electoral campaigns.

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Interim by-laws dealing with matters pertaining to the structure and functioning of the Alliance not set down in this Constitution may be adopted by the National Executive. Such by-laws shall be submitted to the following National Conference or **Special Conference (as per 4.1)** for ratification.

[The suggestions indicated for section 2 of the draft constitution could be shifted to the proposed section 3 indicated in Sue Bolton’s contribution in Preconference Bulletin #3, or adopted by the NLC at the July 20 hook-up]

2. FOR FULL PARTICIPATION AND OPEN DEBATE

Moved: Paul Petersen

Marrickville Socialist Alliance

Seconded: Joshua Heuchan

Marrickville Socialist Alliance

Motion: That the draft constitution be amended to include the following:

“ 3.6 The Socialist Alliance broadsheet will facilitate ‘open debate’. That is it will:

- accept contributions from members who accept the positions of the Alliance but take up their right to debate those positions consistent with 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5;
- accept contributions from non members so as to encourage engagement with other socialist and progressive tendencies.

The Alliance reserves the right to reply to any article and to establish a reasonable word length.”

Rationale

The National Executive referred the issue of forums for debate of policy to the National Conference.

This motion:

- Gives body to our stated intention to encourage full debate and maintenance of identity.
- Gives us the means to engage with and debate non members who may dissent from their own party/organisation or disagree with our policies. In turn it will play an educative role within the left.
- Facilitates a process by which the class and its more active agents act on us by revealing their perception of events/policy, providing a barometer of consciousness within and outside the Alliance.

This motion does not contradict the requirement for members to publicly support Alliance policy as representatives of the Alliance. Nor does the motion mean we are lapsing into political relativism. The Broadsheet would unambiguously state Alliance policy (including the fact that Alliance members accept that policy) while demonstrating that the organisation is a live forum whose policies are decided by its members through engagement with the more active and progressive sections of the working class (as opposed to being decided in abstract).

One of the current aims of the broadsheet is recruitment. Open debate will signal that the Alliance is not based on a stage managed consensus or lowest common denominator of the two largest sponsor groups.

An Alliance broadsheet is not useful if it is simplistic, absolutist and assertionist. Evangelism might be required to keep sects running but it has no place in developing revolutionary consciousness. Revolutionary consciousness is not just the realization that socialism is the answer (arising from exposure to transitional demands or first hand experience of exploitation and oppression). It is also about equipping militants and activists with the tools of analysis to reflect on, understand and act collectively on their own circumstances (as opposed to learning predigested ‘truths’ and party lines).

Can these aims be met by other means eg public forums? These methods are not mutually exclusive but ‘public forums’ would only make a limited contribution. In truth these forums only attract small number of outsiders... providing they have the time, and geographic proximity to attend. Publishing on the other hand may allow us to extend debates to those activists who don’t usually inhabit the small milieu of near full time socialist activity.

3. BRANCHES, STATE LIAISON COMMITTEES AND ELECTIONS

By David Silcock,

Wills Socialist Alliance, Melbourne

The focus of the Socialist Alliance has been to practice unity of the left in a real sense. This reflects the advances made primarily with the success of the joint work around the S11 blockade.

To avoid confusions the focus of the joint work has selected electoral work. This is either new to the organisations which founded Socialist Alliance or of a secondary and marginal activity. Obviously the pending national election assisted this focus.

The section (6) within the proposed constitution of the Alliance reflects this focus and it is this which my motion addresses.

Section 6 of the proposed constitution currently reads:

“LOCAL BRANCHES.

6.1. The basic unit of the Socialist Alliance shall be the local branch. A branch shall have at least seven members. Members live in the area covered by the branch, which shall be organised on the basis of federal electorates.

6.2. The quorum at Branch meetings shall be five, or 25 per cent, whichever is the greater. Branch decisions shall be by show of hands and by simple majority.

6.3. Branches shall elect office bearers, including a Convenor, Treasurer and Returning Officer, annually. Office bearers can be voted out at any properly convened Branch meeting. A properly convened Branch meeting is one that is held at a regular time, or is one for which at least two weeks notice is given.

6.4. Branches shall be responsible for ensuring a political discussion at branch meetings, carrying out campaigns in their area in support of workers' and social movement struggles, and for the running of election campaigns.

6.5. Providing their material does not contradict the core Alliance platform, local Alliance groups shall be free to raise additional, specific demands within their material.”

In formal terms with no attention to the content of this section it requires amending. The sentence

“A properly convened Branch meeting is one that is held at a regular time, or is one for which at least two weeks notice is given.” Should be stated within its own sub-section and not tagged on to the definition of how branch officials can be recalled.

What is wrong is the alignment of branches as per the AEC federal election boundaries. The AEC has stated that these boundaries, with the exception of Victoria, will change when the next election is called. We will immediately have to follow a branch membership re-shuffle just as the election is called if the current constitution is to be adhered to.

However, the decision to make federal constituencies the branch determinant shows a one-sided, even wooden approach to politics. The key geographical organising feature of local activities for any political organisation, especially those on the left is the Local Government Authority (LGA) or suburb.

The electoral boundaries cross LGA's, suburb's even streets. Comrades from affiliated organisations who attend that organisations branches will in more than a few cases have to become members of different Alliance branches on the basis of the constitution.

On specific points of Section 6.

Section 6.1

It should be expected that a branch can function with a membership of 5. Some of the affiliate organisations which manage to exist on the national and local level have barely more than five members. This number of organised comrades are capable of supporting the establishment of the Socialist Alliance the same number should be expected sufficient to establish a branch of the Socialist Alliance.

It will be expected that when a new branch is being established it is being done with the assistance of experienced members, local branches and State Liaison Committees.

A further concern with how the constitution addresses the needs of democracy within the organization is the stipend that *“..at least two*

weeks notice is given.” Comrades are aware that there are situations which will require the immediate calling of a branch. To delay a meeting for two weeks because of a constitutional clause just does not reflect the needs of an organisation which is seeking to change the world.

The following is proposed as a replacement of section 6 of the constitution.

LOCAL BRANCHES

6.1. The basic unit of the Socialist Alliance shall be the local branch.

A branch shall have at least five members.

A branch will be established wherever it is felt there will be opportunities for the Alliance and the local environment is conducive to establishment and maintenance of branch life.

All new branches will seek accreditation from the National Committee.

6.2. The quorum at Branch meetings shall be three, or 25 per cent, whichever is the greater.

Branch decisions shall be by show of hands and by simple majority

6.3. Branches will elect required office bearers annually.

These will include a Convenor and Secretary Office bearers can be re-called by the branch membership at a branch meeting.

6.4. Branches shall be responsible for ensuring a political discussion at branch meetings, carrying out campaigns in their area in support of workers’ and oppressed struggles and for the running of election campaigns.

Under the co-ordination of the State Liaison Committee Branches will work together with other branches to fight any local, state or federal elections.

6.5. Branches will at all times promote the policies and programs of the Socialist Alliance.

Branches will raise additional demands, determining the strategy and tactics required to forward any local struggle of working or oppressed people.

Branches will inform State Liaison Committee of all local struggles being fought and seek

where appropriate assistance from the State Liaison Committee to progress these struggles.”

To reflect the amendments made above the following are proposed to address Sections 7 and 9, State, district and city-wide organising committees and Election Campaigns and Preselection.

Section 7 STATE, DISTRICT AND CITY-WIDE ORGANISING COMMITTEES

7.1. State Liaison Committees (SLC) will be established.

7.2. SLC will be responsible for organizing and coordinating campaigns across states and districts, in tandem with branches, in their geographical regions.

7.3. SLC’s shall elect their own executives and office bearers.

7.4. Members of SLC’s shall be elected by branches this will be on the basis of one delegate per branch.

7.5. Prior to Federal Elections and annually thereafter SLC will call pre-selection meetings of all members in any constituency where the Alliance will stand. Election of the Alliance candidate will be decided at these meetings.

Section 9 ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND PRESELECTION

9.1. SLC’s will call meetings of all constituency members to pre-select the candidate for their electorate. Nominations shall be called 21 days before such meeting.

9.2. The SLC shall supply candidates for pre-selection with a list of all eligible voters. Candidates shall be given equal time of at least five minutes each to speak to the meeting. The pre-selected candidate shall be the person with the most votes.

9.3. SLC and branches shall also be responsible for election campaign including raising finance to nominate candidates and production of material (above and beyond

whatever common election material that can be provided centrally).

9.4. They shall also be responsible for their campaigns, and for fulfilling any local legal requirements and providing necessary information to the National Executive for the purposes of complying with the election legislation (records of membership, donations,

etc.)

9.5. Senate, state upper-house and city-wide candidates shall be preselected by state or city-wide conferences of the Alliance.

9.6. In the event of disputes about candidates individuals can appeal to the National Committee who will have final say.

4. WORKERS' LIBERTY CHANGES TO CONSTITUTION

Workers' Liberty is concerned about the following section in the draft Constitution:

8. CAUCUSES

8.1. "Any individual member or affiliate organisation shall have the right to form a caucus for the purpose of influencing Alliance policy and activity. As far as possible caucus meetings shall be open and transparent. However, once Alliance policy and campaigning priorities are decided caucuses are expected to abide by them and not organise public campaigns in opposition to Alliance policy."

What does the clause "caucuses are expected to abide by them and not organising public campaigns in opposition to Alliance policy" mean? This could leave things open to abuse.

We propose the following re-wording for the second sentence of 8.1 above:

"Once Alliance policy and campaigning priorities are decided, SA caucuses and members are expected to make it clear that if they hold an opposing point of view, it is not to be expressed in the name of the Alliance."