

# PRECONFERENCE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The founding conference of the  
Socialist Alliance in Australia

Number 6

July 2001

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

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
Building the Alliance ( <i>International Socialist Organisation</i> )	2
<b>Unions and the ALP</b>	
Policy for work in the unions ( <i>Phil Sandford</i> )	4
Unions and the ALP ( <i>Phil Sandford</i> )	5
The unions and the Labour Party in Britain ( <i>Martin Thomas</i> )	10
Where is the Socialist Alliance going ( <i>David Silcock</i> )	12
Tasks of the Alliance ( <i>Alan Woodcraft</i> )	14
<b>Preference policy</b>	
Proposal on preferences ( <i>Workers' Liberty</i> )	15
Socialist Alliance preferencing ( <i>Workers' Power</i> )	16
Slate voting proposal for the National Executive ( <i>Workers' Power</i> )	19
An open letter to Socialist Alliance members ( <i>Workers' Power</i> )	20
A proposal for the inclusion of a demand around transgender rights ( <i>Virginia Brown</i> )	22
From decriminalisation of personal drug use; for safe injecting rooms to legalisation of personal drug use; immediate trials of prescription heroin ( <i>Michael Arnold</i> )	25
Suggested priority pledge ( <i>Workers' Liberty</i> )	26

The logo for the Socialist Alliance features the word "Socialist" in a bold, black, sans-serif font. A red five-pointed star is positioned above the letter "i". Below "Socialist" is the word "Alliance" in a larger, bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter "A" in "Alliance" is significantly larger and colored red, while the remaining letters "lliance" are black.

# BUILDING THE ALLIANCE

## A contribution from the International Socialist Organisation

Peter Reith's decision to quit parliament has to be one of THE political highlights of the year. If ever there was an indication of the disarray in the ranks of the Liberals, this is it. Reith was perhaps their most serious conservative warrior -- the biggest rat yet to desert the sinking ship.

It is also another indication that the anti-Liberal trend that engulfed Western Australia and Queensland will be translated into the national electoral arena. The Liberals' desperation to improve their opinion poll scores can be seen in the policy backflips -- most recently they cancelled the massive debts of families hit by Centrelink back payments. And the furore over taxing contractors is still giving the Liberals headaches. The likelihood is that there will be more as they continue to play catch-up. Howard will almost certainly extend the \$14,000 offer for first home buyers.

This is one side of the political equation for the Socialist Alliance. Underpinning the anti-Liberal anger is a deep-seated opposition to economic rationalism. Quite simply, people are fed up with cuts, job uncertainty, and working harder and longer to make ends meet. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the opposition to the GST. Fully 56 per cent think they are worse off, and 58 per cent oppose the entire tax package.

The more ideological development of this discontent can be seen in the massive resentment of the lifestyle of the One.Tel or HIH bosses. The years of the Liberals are now widely understood as benefiting the rich and the social elites at the expense of workers and those on welfare. Even TV current affairs shows more and more frequently highlight injustices by contrasting the different ways government, the law, etc, deal with those at the bottom and those at the top. For example, one recent show highlighted the tax office toleration of tax avoidance by the rich compared to their efforts to slug "the battlers".

The immediate beneficiary of this discontent is the Labor Party. Their opinion polls are obviously up and on present indications they will easily win the federal election. But alongside this goes an enormous discontent with the fact that Labor offers little or nothing as an alternative.

That gap between what people want and what Labor offers can be seen in the election results in Western Australia and Queensland, where Greens and other minor candidates did well. Another indication was the poll that showed that four out of five Labor voters think that Labor won't change the GST at all, despite their promise of rolling it back. There is also a deep pool of cynicism towards Labor as a result of the memory of the last period of Labor government under Hawke and Keating.

That memory also tempers the union leaders' attitude to Labor. The ACTU has been forthright in placing demands on the next Labor government. The ETU in Victoria endorsed the Greens for the Melbourne City Council. CFMEU national secretary John Maitland has said that the union is open to considering funding non-Labor candidates.

There is a recognition the unions will have to fight to improve living standards rather than depend on a Labor government. The clashes with state Labor governments (over workers' compensation in NSW for example), re-inforce the view that Labor can't be trusted.

It was into this volatile political situation that the Socialist Alliance emerged. Nine socialist groups came together to establish the Alliance as an electoral vehicle to contest the next federal elections. There is an existing and growing alienation of some of Labor's traditional support base. There was also a significant and growing gap between the hopes of most Labor voters and what the Labor Party is actually offering. As well, the anti-capitalist movement that burst onto the local scene with S11 continues to develop, influencing young people and the labour movement as it goes.

The formation of the Alliance was an historic development. The unity of the socialist groups was crucial to the possibility of its success. It was a recognition that by uniting on an action platform, we could popularise a pro-active program to turn the tide on economic rationalism. In many respects the platform represents a list of "old-Labor" demands, but we are in circumstances where neither Labor nor the union

leaders are prepared to put them forward, let alone fight for them.

The immediate task of the Alliance is to reach those thousands and thousands of disaffected Labor voters. That will require a creative combination of campaigning and electioneering to raise the profile of the Alliance. We will have to fight to get the biggest vote we possibly can. By showing the widespread support for a real alternative, a good result will help to increase the confidence of people everywhere, in the unions, communities, in the campaigns, to fight back.

### ***Beyond the election***

Every group is committed to making the Alliance as successful as we possibly can, and everyone wants it to continue after the election. Indeed there is every reason to believe that it will be after this election, with a Labor government in office, that the contradictions between those that vote Labor and what a Labor government delivers will get even sharper.

Expectations will be unmet, over the GST, funding for education and nursing homes, etc. The likely unfavourable economic conditions that the new Labor government will face will limit spending initiatives and constantly pressure them to be good economic managers. There will be the attacks that the government itself makes on its supporters, such as we have seen in NSW or with the pitiful allocation to education in the recent Victorian budget.

Such a situation could see significant layers of workers beginning to break from Laborism and reformism, creating a political climate even more favourable for an Alliance that has established an electoral foothold in 2001.

### ***The Alliance has tremendous potential***

The level of unity and activity achieved so far by the constituent groups bodes well. Just the process of getting the various groups together has shifted politics on the left and has been an attraction for a number of people to join the Alliance.

But the future of the Alliance cannot be left at uniting the existing forces of the far left (our combined membership is tiny). It depends crucially on winning those who are looking to the left of Labor for a socialist alternative, and winning over some of the thousands and thousands who still do look to the ALP.

This understanding puts the tasks of the Alliance in perspective. If we are going to win over disaffected Labor voters, we need a platform that both captures the imagination and is the basis of an achievable alternative to the market consensus between Labor and Liberal.

Having a full program of socialist demands would be an obstacle to that process. We want to provide a home and a basis for working alongside those who are breaking with Labor but who may not yet be convinced of socialism as a fundamentally new social order. This will be vital to the success of the Alliance.

Because we understand that the real strength of the left is in the struggle in the workplaces, the campuses and the communities, building (and maintaining) the Alliance as an activist group will be another crucial aspect of attracting and working alongside people on a sustained basis. One of the attractions of the Alliance is that many people recognise that there are campaigns and issues to be fought regardless of the election results. (Many people who vote Labor nonetheless recognise that it is necessary to fight.)

The Alliance can play a role in pulling those thousands who are breaking with Labor to the left and in the process re-establish socialism as a legitimate part of the mainstream political life.

### ***What next?***

We have made a small beginning. Our campaign in Aston has given us some experience and profile, and has helped establish a stronger local branch. If we needed it, we have got a taste of how much the Liberals are hated and just how much scope there is to build a socialist alternative among those who want to see a real break from economic rationalism and the total rule of market forces. This can be summed up in the phrase, scrap the GST, don't just roll it back.

We have a few months before the election to build new branches and extend the existing ones. The experience of the British Socialist Alliance is valuable in this regard. It did best where there has been sustained activity in the local communities. That is where it had a local profile. This also resulted in significant local figures joining or endorsing the Alliance and sometimes bringing a local or campaign constituency with them.

Our 30 June "day of protest" over the GST was quite a success. Although we may not get the

same extensive media coverage, we should aim to repeat the exercise over other issues. It is the kind of thing that connects with the concerns of ordinary people and establishes the Alliance as not just posturing for a vote, but a campaigning organisation that plans to make a difference to the things that matter.

There are some things we need to do to take the Alliance to the next phase.

- (i) Every branch needs a rigorous recruiting drive. Every existing member must know two or three more people who are open to joining the Alliance. Pushing out will not only get us new members but will ensure there is greater awareness of the Alliance among an important layer of activists.
- (ii) Every branch should invite local campaigning groups to speak at Alliance meetings to promote those campaigns, indicate our support and to extend and involve ourselves in the existing networks around such campaigns
- (iii) Every branch should make a list of local community and union groups and approach them about having an Alliance speaker attend their group meeting. The list can also be a basis for approaching groups about endorsing the Alliance for the election.
- (iv) Organise local launches with representative of local campaign

groups; this should be combined with a local awareness offensive of posters, letterboxing, leafleting and petitioning at railway stations and bus stops.

- (v) We need to step up Alliance branch organisation. Every branch should move to meeting at least fortnightly. We need to elect branch committees that take responsibility for membership, finances, convening meetings, etc.
- (vi) We should repeat our GST success with another national day of action around workers' entitlements or education funding (perhaps linking in with any education union mobilisations). But we should also take local initiatives with speakouts, etc, particularly when there is a local focus -- a bank branch closure, an industrial dispute, an outrageous comment from the local MP, etc

There is much for the Alliance to do.

The Alliance has the potential to transform the political situation in Australia. A united left gives us the best chance for a long time of posing a left alternative to Labor at a time of a growing crisis in Laborism and a developing crisis in capitalism.

The key to the radical transformation of Australian society are the tens of thousands of Labor voters looking to the left. We need them in the Alliance.

# POLICY FOR WORK IN THE UNIONS

By Phil Sandford, Workers League and Parramatta Socialist Alliance

The Workers League wishes to submit the following policy regarding work in the unions for vote at Conference:

That Socialist Alliance members belong to their appropriate union and are active around the following issues:

1. To recruit to and build their union branch.
2. To win delegate positions on the basis of a fight to defend their members' wages and conditions.
3. Every worker should have the right to join a union and oblige their employer to recognize and negotiate with the union – unions should have the right to gain access to the workplace, to inspect company plans and books, to strike, to picket effectively, and to act in solidarity with other unions or social causes.
4. Repeal anti-union laws: The Workplace Relations Act and Sections 45D and E of the Trade Practices Act.
5. No individual contracts
6. To defend 60/40 representation in the ALP.
7. To campaign in the workplace around relevant issues from the Socialist Alliance platform.

## *Statement in support*

1. The role of Socialist Alliance members in the unions has still to be clarified. As an electoral alliance for the federal elections the alliance does not need to develop a framework for long-term work in the unions. Assuming the Alliance continues past the elections this policy is

proposed to guide any union work the Alliance conducts.

2. One of the biggest issues facing the union movement today is the slump in union membership, particularly in the private sector (19%). The union leadership has become acutely aware of this problem in recent years because it has weakened their bargaining strength with employers and threatens their bureaucratic privileges. They have been forced to introduce recruiting campaigns in most unions, in many cases built around emphasising the benefits of membership such as discount computers.

3. One of the major ways to attract members is have a leadership which keeps close to its membership and is prepared to fight on issues, but in many cases Alliance members will have to establish these conditions in their own workplaces. They will have to work in, or establish, broad-based union caucuses built on basic demands.

4. Union struggles may emerge on a wide variety of issues but 60/40 representation in the ALP is shaping up to be one of the issues where the union movement is going to come into headlong conflict with a future Beazley government. It is under attack by sections of the Liberals and the Labor right and Socialist Alliance should be in the forefront of defending union representation in the ALP (See also our Document 'Unions and the ALP')

5. Is this proposal 'syndicalist' and 'economist'? To a certain extent yes. At this stage in the development of the left and of Socialist Alliance in particular this is exactly what is required. Lenin's 'What Is To Be Done?' is very often misquoted in this context. It is certainly true that socialist theory has to be bought 'from the outside' and that the working class cannot spontaneously develop a socialist consciousness. But Socialist Alliance members in the unions first have to build a base through struggle, and there is no short-cut to this.

# UNIONS AND THE ALP

By Phil Sandford, Workers League and Parramatta Socialist Alliance

The issue of union disaffiliation from the ALP has been raised by the DSP, both by Dick Nicholls in Green Left (July 11) and Melanie Sjoberg in SA Discussion Bulletin 2.

Briefly, the arguments are that ‘an increasing number of workers and unionists are disillusioned with the ALP’, some unions have disaffiliated or are considering it, and that a similar development is taking place in Britain. Therefore Socialist Alliance should adopt a policy of advocating that unions should disaffiliate, an issue on which the SA Platform is currently silent.

However, this is a very one-sided approach to the issue. It is certainly true that there is widespread anger among many workers at present about the Carr government’s attack on workers’ compensation. It is also true that the most likely scenario in the coming federal election is a huge swing to Labor and a clash between the unions and the federal government as it tries to go down the Blair road. The NSW workers compensation struggle gives an inkling of the battles that are coming up. Many people will vote Labor “with gritted teeth”, and in many cases it will be a negative vote against Howard rather than a positive vote for Beazley. Nonetheless, illusions in the Laborites still persist despite all their betrayals. In other words, the question of breaking workers from their treacherous ALP leadership is by no means a simple one.

Before continuing let’s be clear about some basic issues: ALP governments are capitalist governments, and the issue is not about putting pressure on them. Nor is the issue entry into the Labor Party. The issue is how Socialist Alliance approaches workers who support the ALP, many because they can see no alternative, and hope that somehow the ALP left will win.

1. Although not a popular view in some quarters the formation of the Labor Party was progressive. It reflected the fact that workers had come to recognize the limits of militant trade unionism and that some form of political expression was necessary. The unions are defensive organisations under capitalism. While they will play a crucial

role in the struggle for socialism, they cannot lead that struggle.

2. The threat of disaffiliation, and sometimes disaffiliation itself, has a long history in the Australian labor movement. Whether or not socialists would support a particular disaffiliation would depend on a number of issues, but it could not be decided simply on the basis of a principle that affiliation or disaffiliation was automatically a good thing. Often it is a way of putting pressure on the ALP. For example, the often-cited case of the NSW Fire Brigades union built into its disaffiliation the important qualifier ‘while Carr is still leader’. In other cases it has been a bureaucratic move by a union leadership. In any event it is not automatically a move to the left.

The example of the British public sector union UNISON also needs to be clarified. It was not a vote to disaffiliate. On a motion put by a member of the Socialist Party the union conference voted to consider the issue and to report back to the next annual conference.

3. If a union were to disaffiliate with the ALP what would they do? Would no political affiliation be more progressive? The only possibilities would seem to be the Australian Democrats – the party that ensured passage of Reith’s anti-union laws – or the Greens, a party which contains a strong anti-union grouping. If the implication is that unions might affiliate with Socialist Alliance then this is not a good perspective for us given that we have only just formed, we have few union delegates, and our record of struggle as an Alliance is very limited at this point.

4. Comrade Melanie Sjoberg says “There is a similar political trend in England and Scotland...” But while developments in Britain are of particular interest to socialists in Australia because of the historic connection between the two countries, it would be foolish to transpose them to Australia. The two social democratic parties have many similarities, but the way class struggle has developed also has important differences. It was the Hawke and Keating Labor governments who carried out the attack on the nationalised industries, in Britain it was Thatcher. In the past period it has been Blair in Britain who has carried out the attacks on the working class,

here is has been the Howard government federally and the state Labor governments.

The massive abstention in the recent British election, particularly in working class areas, reflects the hatred for the Blair government in important sections of the working class. But there is no evidence of a similar hatred for Beazley. What is clear is that Beazley will try to go down the Blair path, but it is by no means certain that he can achieve this, certainly not without a major clash with the unions.

5. One major problem for those calling for disaffiliation is that a section of the parliamentary right in the ALP is also working to undermine the influence of the unions in the party so they can push ahead with their plans to push the party even further to the right. This does not automatically mean that the proposed disaffiliation policy for the Alliance is wrong, because we could point out that our position is held for different reasons to the ALP right. However, it does make it harder for us to denounce this move and therefore cuts off us from many unionists and Labor Party members and supporters who will correctly fight on this issue. Socialist Alliance should be in the forefront of defending 60/40, which is shaping up to be one of the big struggles under a Beazley government.

6. The recent struggle over workers' compensation in NSW, a struggle which is by no means concluded, saw a historic development: unions set up a picket line around Parliament House to prevent the passage of Carr's legislation and some unions called for a special ALP conference to overturn the legislation. Given the fact that a new leader of the Labor Council had just taken over in the context of a split between the right-wing unions this was an extraordinary situation.

While it is always easy to be right in hindsight, it is clear that Socialist Alliance should have thrown itself into supporting the call for the special ALP conference. Instead, we put out a leaflet calling on workers to consider disaffiliation.

One of the most interesting meetings during the campaign was attended by about 25 unionists, most of them members of Socialist Alliance. The discussion centred around the issue of trying to take forward the struggle against Carr's changes and it reflected the real issues and problems that socialists face in the workplace. The strength of

the discussion was that it avoided generalities and easy solutions.

This is a model for union work in the Alliance if it continues past the federal election. Rather than embarking on a disaffiliation policy which will isolate members we should concentrate on some basic issues. Every Socialist Alliance member must become an active member of their appropriate union. At a time when union membership has slumped from 50% to 25% in the past 20 years the first priority for Socialist Alliance unionists is simple: to recruit to and build their union branch. They have to be respected in the workplace as good workers and they have to win positions in the union through a patient struggle to defend their members.

Economism can be a serious political weakness, but at this stage of its development the Alliance needs above all some real experiences of day-to-day struggle in the unions and it needs to build a real base. This will not be done by sloganising and there are no easy roads or short cuts.

7. At the heart of this discussion is the issue of who the Alliance is addressing in its campaigning work and in the election campaign. If we are simply talking to the activists in M1, S11 and CHOGM and a small group of the most class conscious workers the issue of our relation to the ALP is of no great significance. If we are going to campaign in a broader way we need a way of approaching ALP members and supporters along the following lines:

“We tell you that Beazley will betray, but you don't believe us and you think that we are too small to form a government. So we will help you put the ALP into power and we will put this to the test. We will stand beside you in the fight to defend your jobs, wages and conditions when the Labor government attacks them and we will convince you in practice that Socialist Alliance is worthy of your support.”

8. There is a tension between the Alliance's position of wanting a Labor government in power in order to expose Laborism, and the call for disaffiliation. Why would we want to see a Labor government in power with a weakened trade union base? How would that help expose reformism?

9. Comrade Dick Nicholls, one of the two national convenors of Socialist Alliance,

says that there was a violent reaction against the ALP in NSW over workers compensation in four or five phone calls to Socialist Alliance. There certainly was a reaction against Carr, but some workers reacted by joining the ALP to fight Carr, and some members of the Public Service Association reacted by opening up a discussion of affiliating to the ALP for the same reason. We have to be careful when developing Socialist Alliance policy not to be too hasty with interpreting phone calls.

**11. Comrade Dick feels that the issue of political representation is too important to be left to meetings of union delegates or even to greater rank-and-file involvement. In some mysterious way workers are going to rise up and demand that their union affiliate with Socialist Alliance. In reality even when workers know their leadership is rotten they will not throw it away without a serious alternative: it is the historic leadership that the**

**working class has built, with all its weaknesses, deformations and treachery.**

12. Comrade Dick suggests that the union movement "is moribund and decrepit". Given the upsurge in NSW around workers compensation, this seems a strange formulation. It is one thing to criticise the union leadership, but to dismiss the whole of the movement in this way would not be a good approach for Socialist Alliance to adopt.

### ***Conclusion***

It would be a major mistake for Socialist Alliance to adopt a policy of advocating union disaffiliation from the Labor Party. It is a position which has only emerged three weeks before the national conference and it has been barely discussed in the branches. It is not based on any examination of the history of the labour movement or of the real tasks facing socialists in the unions. It is a policy which would isolate the Alliance from the major clashes that are coming up with the federal Labor government.

# THE UNIONS AND THE LABOUR PARTY IN BRITAIN

By Martin Thomas, on behalf of Workers' Liberty

Melanie Sjoberg's contribution in Discussion Bulletin 2 gets some things wrong about developments in the unions in Britain.

There was no vote at the Fire Brigades Union conference this May on disaffiliating from Labour. The conference did, on 23 May, against the wishes of the union leadership, resolve to open the possibility of union money being used to back election candidates against New Labour if they are more in line with union policy. According to a report by Matt Wrack, the London FBU activist and Socialist Alliance supporter who moved the successful resolution, it would probably not have been passed unless another resolution (from Bedfordshire FBU) calling for disaffiliation from Labour had first been withdrawn.

The conference of the post and telecom union CWU, soon after, voted down a similar motion two-to-one. But the CWU already has standing policy to withdraw support from Labour if it privatises the Post Office - and Blair's government seems set on doing just that.

On 21 June UNISON conference voted for a review of the union's political funds. (UNISON, by a historical quirk, has two political funds, one Labour-affiliated and one "general"). That vote, like the FBU one, was carried against the conference platform. The left at the conference took pains to ensure that all the speakers for the resolution, bar one, were, and identified themselves as, Labour Party members who emphasised that the resolution was not anti-Labour. Otherwise, probably, the resolution would not have been carried. The conference also voted, with the union leaders' support, for "strikes when deemed necessary, a national day of action and a national demonstration against [the Labour government's policy of] privatisation, with a lobby of parliament".

On 29 June the conference of the rail union RMT resolved: "that it cannot and will not support a Labour Government that has deserted its working-class roots and supporters and jumps into bed with its big business friends. It therefore declares that, unless these disastrous policies are changed,

we will no longer support them politically or financially". The RMT already has, since 1998, conference policy to withdraw union sponsorship from any Labour MP who fails to support rail renationalisation, though the union leadership has so far done nothing to implement that policy. All this is certainly proof of an unprecedented ferment among union activists in Britain. The Socialist Alliance can claim some credit for it. One of the factors in the Fire Brigades Union was that four FBU activists were standing in the general election as Socialist Alliance candidates. Disaffiliation is not, however, immediately on the cards, even in a small and exceptionally left-wing union like the FBU. And the pattern is not quite so simple as a "healthy dynamic" putting the unions on a conveyor belt which will smoothly deliver them to the Socialist Alliance. At the end of June, Bill Morris of the TGWU publicly speculated about his union organising joint campaigns over public services with the Liberal Democrats. The TGWU logo might appear on Lib-Dem posters.

A few days later, Britain's other big general union, the GMB, announced it would send postcards to Labour MPs with a picture of Dr Richard Taylor, who won a seat in the general election as a "Health Concern" independent. The postcards will say, "He stood up for public services, will you?" GMB general secretary John Edmonds said: "Tony Blair has claimed he has a mandate of support from the public for his public sector privatisation plans. We intend to put that claim to the test. Our campaign is just asking a simple question, 'Will you stand up for public services in the same way Dr Taylor did'. If the answer to that question is, 'no', then obviously it will be very hard for our members to support MPs who are prepared to see our public services effectively privatised out of existence". This too is double-edged. It is an assertion of trade-union independence. But Dr Taylor is no working-class activist, and his group, Health Concern, runs the local council in coalition with the Tories.

The "dynamic" is unlikely to lead unions directly to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance - the sober fact is that we got an average of only 1.62% in the selected seats we contested at the general election - and may instead lead them to regress. The more militant unions may end up like the US unions, sponsoring and petitioning chosen "friends of labour" in the mainstream bourgeois parties

(primarily Lib Dems and nationalists in Britain, probably Democrats, Greens, and maybe Nationals in Australia), instead of striving for coordinated and independent working-class representation in any form.

It will be better, more productive, more conducive to a reassertion of independent working-class politics, if the militant unions used their positions in the Labour structures to rally the whole labour

movement for a fight against the sell-out parliamentary leaderships. The British Labour Party leadership is already frantically manoeuvring to try to block union resolutions against its privatisation programme from appearing on its October conference agenda. A real fight through those channels could lead to a mass break with Blair, and the creation of an authentic, organically-based working-class political alternative.

# WHERE IS THE SOCIALIST ALLIANCE GOING?

By David Silcock

*Wills Socialist Alliance*

## **Where we have come from.**

The major achievement in the last ten years of the revolutionary left in Australia was the mobilization for the S11 protests against the World Economic Forum. Many involved in the organizing for that event were unsure up to the end just how successful it would be. Nobody predicted the size and strength of the protest beforehand. All involved were stunned through what had been achieved.

In early November a conference was called in Melbourne to discuss the outcome from the mobilization. It was billed as an opportunity for the left to re-assess what it had done, examine how it had done it and look at methods of going forward.

There was a groundswell of “unity in action made us strong”. There were many people during the breaks that were discussing a new organisation of revolutionary left forces. The conference sadly didn’t bite the bullet itself and there was no real debate over this topic in the sessions.

However the left groups were meeting and the outline of Socialist Alliance was drawn up. The Socialist Alliance is now **real**. First by-election fought and its founding conference in early August.

## **What is the Socialist Alliance?**

However, what is the Socialist Alliance? A question that seems harder to answer:

- A regroupment of left organizations
- An electoral strategy for the left groups
- A staging party as workers and activists become involved in organised politics before they are recruited to one of the founding organisations.

To myself it was, and is, the organisation that has got me back into organised politics. This will be the case for many single organisation members (SOM).

I proudly say this is my organisation. I ask comrades who are in two organisations where their first loyalties lie. The answer is invariably

not the Socialist Alliance. What does this answer mean to the single organisation member? What are the “small” organisations, the founding organisations, going to do?

## **What our founders thought.**

The original founders said:

Freedom Socialist Party

*The best way to fight the Liberals is to build a real anti-capitalist alternative.*

Democratic Socialist Party

*Many more people are now seeking the alternative that the Socialist Alliance can provide.*

International Socialist Organisation

*The Socialist Alliance can show that there is an alternative to the corporate control of society.*

Socialist Democracy

*If we can work together in the Socialist Alliance project in this year's federal election and in future polls, this will be another qualitative leap*

Worker-Communist Party of Iraq (in Australia)

*we need to explain to people that parliament is an instrument for the bourgeoisie. It is not our instrument; our instrument is the socialist government and the workers' council*

Workers Power

*The Socialist Alliance has the potential to provide a real, fighting and united alternative to Labor, something desperately needed after 25 years of cutbacks.*

Workers Liberty

*welcomes the Socialist Alliance initiative as a chance to unite the left around political goals*

Workers League

*it is vital that the left unites in this way in opposition to the capitalist parties*

What are the overriding ideas presented above:

- Socialism
- Revolution
- Party?

It is on the last point that the groups get hesitant. The duality, which currently exists, has the ability to disrupt the new larger organisation. A logical spin-off from this duality is to place more and

more emphasis on SA being an electoral alternative.

In the run up to the next election it is likely that that is all we will be and then there will be the issue of what to do after the election. To make the sole focus the election is to disarm comrades preparing for the struggles which lie ahead regardless of SA showing in the election, regardless of which major party wins the election.

#### **Draft platform for an electoral alliance.**

The draft platform issued by the National Liaison Cttee, the founding groups, makes no mention of any party building organisations. There is the obligatory call to unite the forces required to “replace capitalism with a socialist society” but as we all know any thoughts of achieving that without a party are utopian pipe dreams.

The draft platform is missing clearly defined transitional demands that will meet the class today and provide a guide to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. To have these demands would require a discussion of the party. The arguments put up against this approach is that we should not have revolutionary demands, no maximum demands.

That to a degree reflects some comrades’ lack of understanding of a revolutionary program but it also conveniently allows the idea of a party to be avoided. We are and remain an electoral bloc. An electoral bloc that carries out other campaigning activities but one's that are seen as

#### **Motion**

*“This conference welcomes and re-affirms the amalgamation of the different organisations and individuals seen in Socialist Alliance. It sees the forthcoming federal election as the key task for the alliance to answer. It resolves to approach this election seeking the experience to raise the issue of a new revolutionary party to be established. It calls on the Alliance to seek at all times to raise the issue of a new revolutionary party in all electioneering work. This is what we mean by the alternative, not a set of ideas but a real functioning party founded around the program of revolution. A real party with real single membership fully committed to the building and expansion of that organisation solely.*

*It calls on all members whether single or double membershiped to fight for the establishment of a new*

subordinate to achieving an increased electoral presence.

#### **The need for the party.**

To become effective even to win our limited platform demands we need not just an electoral alliance but also a revolutionary party. **We cannot declare one at conference** but we can begin the process of getting there. We can commit the membership of Socialist Alliance to review and work out what is needed to achieve the goal of a new revolutionary communist party.

We need to examine the program we are putting forward to the class, anti-capitalist activists, aborigines, women, gay and lesbian, youth, etc.

We need to examine how the different tendencies that the Alliance represents could exist within the one organisation. What would faction rights be, how would democratic centralism be used by the party. The current phrasing in the draft constitution, section 8 speaks more of bureaucratic centralism than communist democratic centralism.

The organisation must be steeled to allow real democratic centralism to be operated. A real debate with organised avenues for different policies to be discussed. A real centralism where decisions are put to the test of practice and then allowed to be validated changed and improved in practice.

*revolutionary party and for the dissolution of the founding groups, as separate organisations, within this party.*

*It seeks to remove from all members any instance where they have to state that their primary political allegiance is to an organisation that is not Socialist Alliance.*

*This conference instructs the incoming organisation committees executive, national, state, district and citywide to develop a timetable for the organisation to prepare for a new party.*

*This conference commits for the review of this work at the next annual conference where if appropriate the timetable for the establishment of the new party will be agreed.”*

# TASKS OF THE ALLIANCE

From Alan Woodcraft,  
*Fremantle Socialist Alliance and International  
Socialist Organisation*

Given the political climate of polarisation, with many workers and poor starting to question the capitalist system and moving to the left at exactly the same time as the ALP are moving to right. With only a slight upturn in workers struggles and confidence. With the real possibility of economic recession given the possibility of the American economy following the Japanese economy into recession and the subsequent impact on the Australian economy. Also given the strength of the revolutionary left. The political landscape ahead is extremely fluid. Therefore the Socialist Alliance has to be a weapon capable of fulfilling more than one need.

## ***In Defence***

The left needs to have some unity to guard against the threat of the growth of the right. SA allows us to capture and organise newly radicalising forces before they can become demoralised and move to the right. Without having to win them to a complete revolutionary position.

## ***An Electoral Intervention***

As a vehicle to push the political climate to the left, with the intention of marginalising the liberals. The game plan to push the ALP to the left and then expose them.

## ***In Attack***

To encourage the Workers/Trade Union movement and actively fight alongside any workers struggles. To likewise orientate in the same way to any community struggles.

## ***As the Potential for a Revolutionary Party***

The importance of this interpretation is that SA must evolve rapidly enough to stay ahead of any disunity/disintegration of its components, and also that it has a fundamentally combat organisational structure.

The many contradictions in the above are only a reflection of the existing reality and as successive contradictions ripen so to must SA change its platform.

Given the above perspective ,the existing platform is inadequate in giving weight to the unemployed and 'house workers', as potential new forces, suggested changes to the platform are;

Under Jobs not Profit, add "Free workskills training on demand"

Under End all Discrimination add after "...political ideology, "employment status".

Note need for further recognition of "housework" and that many parents wish to be able to rear their children themselves.

Under Axe the GST after "Increase social security payments" and "including, non means tested, parenting allowance"

## ***A Necessary Ideological Intervention***

Finally the way that the parliamentary Greens are acting as an alternative to the ALP needs to be defused. This needs to be done by an ideological offensive, which resurrects the history of the Green Bans of the 1970s.

# WORKERS' LIBERTY PROPOSAL ON PREFERENCES

By Janet Burstall and Melissa White. on behalf of Workers' Liberty

In preferencing any candidates *or* in negotiating non-aggression pacts or holding back from running candidates in elections, the criteria are essentially the same — for the election of a Labor government, support for workers in struggle, and the right of workers to organise. For each candidate or party we must take into account the main pressures on that party or candidate against supporting workers' struggles.

In preferencing the Greens in either the House of Representatives or the Senate we need to establish 4 points with the candidate or party:

- (vii) That the candidate or the ticket endorses the repeal of the WRA and sections 45D & E of the Trade Practices Act;
- (viii) That they will support workers defending their jobs — even in environmentally damaging industries such as car manufacturing and logging — and seek solutions that simultaneously protect both the environment *and* employment, rather than subordinate workers to environmental priorities;
- (ix) That they will not do trade-offs for environmental gains that give away or silence them on supporting workers' rights;
- (x) That they will preference Labor, not the Coalition. Split preferences are also unacceptable.

We should offer to *not* run against Labor candidates who undertake publicly to be committed, regardless of ALP caucus, to:

1. Repeal the Workplace Relations Act and sections 45D&E of the Trade Practices Act;
2. Support of union campaigns, even if they come into conflict with the government;
3. Cross the floor if there are any de-registration proceedings against any trade union or any other anti-union action taken by a Labor government.

Last preferences go to One Nation. Second last preferences go to the Coalition.

## Rationale

The Socialist Alliance is standing to give a voice to working-class struggle in politics.

Accordingly, our preferences should be distributed to candidates who are also standing on or for working-class politics, or who are sponsored by working-class organisations.

The key issue in working-class politics is support for class struggle and the right to organise. This is the defining point around which failure and betrayal occurs. If we are asking workers to trust us, we are also asking them to trust our judgement on this issue.

At best, a scale of a more or less "progressive" list of radical and leftish policies presented as the key to socialist policy — instead of working-class struggle — obscures the fundamental issue for socialists in politics. At worst, the scale of "progressive" has been used by Stalinised Communist Parties to justify alliances with anti-working-class forces.

The DSP proposal on preferences says, "[I]n the Senate, where who will govern is not the issue, our main aim, besides getting Socialist Alliance candidates elected, should be to increase the representation of candidates who are more progressive than Labor, chiefly the Greens. Progressive politics in this country would gain from a greater presence of progressive "dissidents" in the Senate, as can be seen from the role played by Bob Brown on many issues."

If as the Socialist Alliance we are to play any role in regrouping political forces who *might* be won to supporting working-class struggle (forces identified by the DSP as "progressive"), then we are not going to do this by offering our preferences carte blanche, simply because a party is deemed "progressive". We are not a lobby group. We can and should put to the Greens the basis on which we can in conscience advocate that advanced workers place reliance on the Greens. "Progressive politics" in this country has meaning for socialists chiefly as the politics of class struggle. Dissent in the Senate is an altogether subsidiary question.

# SOCIALIST ALLIANCE PREFERENCING

## From Workers Power

For a party like the Socialist Alliance preferencing is a statement of our political positions and is as important as our platform. Our how to vote cards make a statement about where we stand on the left and where we think Australian politics should be headed.

We are socialists standing for election not because we think Parliament is a venue for social change but because it gives us a wider opportunity to make propaganda for socialism and to forward working class struggle on the streets not the government benches.

For that reason we are not interested in the horse-trading that purely electoral parties engage in over preferences.

To be able to make principled decisions about preferencing then we have to be clear about why we are standing in elections and what purpose we think this will serve in forwarding the battle for socialist change in society.

The question is simple – if we were not standing in the election ourselves who would we call on the rest of the working class to vote for – and why?

For the majority of our class elections are still seen as the best way to try and change the way society is run – this is reformism – the idea that capitalism can be changed in small ways – reformed – so that it is nicer to workers. Traditionally the party which encapsulates this idea is the Labor Party.

The ALP was, like most labour parties, born out of trade union struggles and the reformist belief that decent MP's, that came from working class organizations, would be able to make decent legislation and help their class. It was an expression of the progressive move beyond trade union struggles and into the sphere of more general politics. As such it was an expression of the desire of the working class to be organized and politically represented as a class.

Those origins and the continuation of the union affiliations and the working class base that still

makes up the party's membership and the branch activists constitutes an organic link with the working class.

We all know that the Labor Party has not lived up to the expectations of its working class membership, at any point in its existence. The ALP went into battle against the BLF, its policies are often openly economic rationalist; Beasley is for a "fairer" GST; they have a shocking track record of race relations and policies on immigration.

But the fact remains that their base is in the working class and that the vast majority of working class people still see them as the only alternative. They retain illusions that whatever is wrong with Labor at least they will be better than the Liberals (and in the most basic way this is correct.)

The only point in voting for such a party is to be able to work alongside the working class activists who will be campaigning for a Labor victory and to put the Party and people's illusions in it – to the test of power.

And in Socialist Alliance we surely acknowledge that our biggest base is likely to be people who have been long-time Labor supporters and have become fed-up with the Party's various backtracks and betrayals.

The Greens on the other hand have never had the same organic base in the working class. There has certainly been a very left aspect to regional parts of the Greens over the years and cooperation between Green activists and the left and trade union movement. But being left and having leftist policies is not enough reason for us as socialists to give these people a vote.

If they are left and agree with leftist policies then they should join the Socialist Alliance. The Greens on the other hand are essentially a petty bourgeoisie movement. That is a movement dominated by members and the politics of the middle class, not the working class. A movement of radicalism rather than socialism and a movement which essentially sees change coming through Parliament. The Greens openly acknowledge that they are an electoral rather than activist organization.

Even if we were to argue about progressive policies, the greens still fall way short of what socialists would want. Their policies on industrial relations are certainly no better than the Labor Party. They in fact support the extension of the powers of the AIRC – the institution that has systematically operated against workers rights and for the bosses.

Then there is the green policy on immigration, directly quoted below...

“Furthermore they have policies on immigration which no socialist could consider progressive. For example accommodation for immigrants deemed to be illegal should meet international standards and procedures for considering their eligibility should be improved and made more humane as stipulated by the international conventions we have ratified;”

In other words, the Greens agree with calling people illegal and support detention centers – they just think they should be humane – the humane locking up of people escaping repression – a little less than progressive?

The Greens have no working class base, even if there are left and working class activists who have turned to them as some sort of alternative to a Labor Party which has moved more and more to the right. And a close look at their policies reveals little said about the working class or the changes in society that the working class needs.

The Greens may have gained the votes of a radicalized sector of young people and even of some militant working class activists fed up with the labor Party. But this doesn't change the nature of the party as a whole. Working class people vote for all manner of parties that have no connection to their class. Working class people vote for the Liberals, for One Nation, for the Democrats – this doesn't mean that we should preference any of these parties or that they in any way express the desire of the working class for something better – for a working class alternative.

None of these parties express in a concrete way the illusions that the working class as a whole have that somehow parliament can be a solution. The Greens, despite their left face in some regions

are really no different. No base with the working class, no real connections, no union affiliations, no branches in working class areas.

And lets not forget that the preferences of the Tasmanian Greens in the last election – that went to the Liberals were in a large part responsible for the Liberals being relected there. Something Bob Brown took some delight in at the time. And with the split preferences in Aston and likelihood of split preferences or preferences that go to the Democrats federally, this will be the same this election. In other words the Greens don't have the implacable opposition to the Liberals. For socialists this should be a clear sign of their class base.

Whatever radical environmentalists might think, the vote for the Greens is not a class vote. And as a Party which unashamedly bases itself on the needs of the working class – this should concern the Socialist Alliance.

But even if this argument seems insufficient, the actual policies of the Greens are surely enough to mean they should receive no preferences from the Socialist Alliance. The Greens giving a percentage of their preferences to the Liberals in the Aston by-election is the worst kind of political opportunism. It is about electoralism rather than any kind of real fight to change society. However equivocal many people may be about Labor, we all know that the Liberals, the unashamedly open party of the capitalist class, are no alternative for the working class. By giving even a small percentage of their preferences to such a party, even in one electorate – it is clear that the Greens have no real understanding of the needs of the working class.

For these reasons, Workers Power propose the following motion:

That in no electorate will the Socialist Alliance preference Greens candidates. Second preferences will go to either the Labor Party or to a candidate that openly stands for and represents working class struggle.

One Nation will always be preferenced last, unless there is an openly fascist candidate standing.

# SLATE VOTING PROPOSAL FOR NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

## From Workers Power

The most democratic way of deciding on a leading committee is to elect it by slate. This ensures coverage geographically and to any other quota agreed to. It also allows the relative strengths of a leadership to be decided as a collective rather than a disparate collection of individuals. It means you know when you vote exactly what kind of leadership is being voted for.

In regards electing a National Executive for the Socialist Alliance we have to ensure that it is first and foremost a national grouping – that is that all the regions where the alliance has branches are represented. Ideally there should be a representative from each major branch, but while we remain the size we currently are, a representative from each state is a reasonable expectation.

A second consideration is representing the various constituent groups of the Alliance, though this should be seen as less important than getting a full geographical spread.

Slates are important because they allow any delegate at a conference to present a collective they see as the best for leading the Alliance and they mean we do not have the ad hoc situation that has been the case with the NLC. Members need to know who the leadership is and it is not good enough to simply substitute anyone from a constituent groups.

It is also a necessary part of the democratic process that everyone at the conference can see the voting process – that it is transparent. For that reason voting for the national Executive should be by show of hand.

For these reasons we propose

*that We elect the National Executive at the conference by slates*

*that Any conference delegate may present a slate to be voted on by the conference*

*that slates be voted on by show of hand and not secret ballot*

*that If no slate receives a majority of the votes in the first round of voting, that the slate with the least number of votes drop off and further rounds of voting be conducted till one slate gains a majority*

*that All delegates must vote for the Executive and that there be no abstentions allowed*

Further we propose the following rules for slates

*Slates must include at least one delegate from each of the States where Socialist Alliance has branches or more than five members at large  
Slates can only be made of those present at the Conference*

Any slate that does not meet these rules will be deemed unconstitutional and disallowed.

The slate should have a minimum of eleven members and must have an uneven number. Where possible slates should be constructed to include at least one member of each of the affiliate organizations.

In order to best organize this for the Conference we propose

*That a Nominations commission be established on the first day comprised of seven delegates with no more than three members of the current NLC.  
That this Commission be empowered to suggest a maximum size for slates, collect slates proposed by delegates, confirm with those nominated that they accept the nomination and confirm nominees membership of one of the constituent organizations (if applicable), or state of origin.*

*For meeting purposes the National Executive will be deemed inquorate if less than one third of the members are present.*

# OPEN LETTER FROM WORKERS POWER TO SOCIALIST ALLIANCE MEMBERS

For a Revolutionary Socialist Party

Comrades,

The Socialist Alliance marks a big step forward for the fight for socialism in Australia. The response among many has been "about time". The Socialist Alliance has already attracted not only new forces, but reactivated many more.

And it's no wonder, when there is such an urgent need for such an organisation, and for unity amongst socialists in the fight against the further erosion of our working and living conditions and our environment. This fight is needed both on the streets and in the elections, as the ALP poses no real alternative to the Coalition for the working class, poor and oppressed.

Meanwhile the massive protests against the World Economic Forum on S11 last year, the battle of the MUA, the protests against Pauline Hanson, and the fact that unions took action on May Day 2001 for the first time since the 2nd World War - all this points to a new fighting spirit amongst young activists, trade unionists and the campaigning generation of the 1960s-70s.

A key question however, is what form of socialist organisation is actually needed today?

Should we be content with simply running in elections? What voice should the Socialist Alliance provide: One that simply mimics the old ALP promises, or one that stands clearly on the side of workers and oppressed against the capitalist class - that is, a revolutionary organisation?

## ***1. Unity for what purpose?***

The solution to the worsening conditions we are forced to live under is not to simply run in elections. As we know, all gains we have won have been fought for, not simply handed to us from our so-called leaders in parliament.

It takes Kerry Packer only 14 minutes to earn the annual average income of an Australian worker, and most of that tax-free. Bill Gates "earns" \$2000 a second, even in his sleep.

This is the order of things under capitalism. The owners of production make sickening amounts of money, based on capital the great majority of them inherited. Meanwhile, over half of the world's population barely manages to scabble together enough food and money to live. If we're lucky enough to work, this work is increasingly insecure, casualised, and based on real wages less than what we earned 10-15 years ago.

This is not a system that can be reformed. Any measly gains we have won are simply eroded at the first chance.

Real power in this society does not rest in the debating chambers of parliament, but on the unelected boards of major corporations which decide where to invest, which factories to close down, what is produced and by whom.

It lies with the faceless senior civil servants who stay in place no matter who is elected, who make the real decisions and tell ministers what they can and can't do. It lies with the security services who phone tap, spy and defame activists and elected representatives who call for radical change.

It lies with the unelected army officers, police chiefs and judges, who violently attack our demonstrations strikes and charge us with "breaching the peace".

Not only do we not need another ALP, we don't need a more left-leaning ALP. In fact we do not need another organisation whose sole role is tinkering with and reforming capitalism. Leading workers and young activists down this road will be a backwards step for socialism.

The only way even our basic needs can be permanently met is to fight for the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement with workers power over society and the state.

We will not attract the new anti-capitalist forces to a new reformist, electoral alliance. They rightfully see this as a weakening of the movement against capitalism, not a strengthening.

## ***2. For a revolutionary workers government***

If the Socialist Alliance was elected, we would not simply be allowed to bring in all the measures the working class needs, or even those currently in the draft platform. We could only succeed with the backing of a united and militant working class movement.

If the Socialist Alliance relied on committees and legislation in parliament to implement its policies, it would be out of office in less than a month. Gough Whitlam's plan for Australia was not as radical as the Socialist Alliance's and even he was slandered in the media and sacked by an unelected Queen's representative.

The Socialist Alliance would face far worse. It would be attacked and sabotaged by the police, the army, the judges, the top civil servants, ASIO, the bosses in the boardrooms and editorial offices and the Murdochs and the Packers. These unelected decision makers would try to crush us.

It would need to rely on the alternative force to the capitalist class in society: the working class.

The working class constitutes a force capable of running the whole of society, because we are already central to making that society run. Without the millions of us - slaving away on pitiful wages - nothing would function; from the factories to the supermarkets, from the railways to the schools.

A Socialist Alliance government, a workers government, would need to be run by workers' councils and defended by the armed power of the working class itself.

It would be a government that would finally be able to defeat the bosses and their state with workers' power, opening the door to a new society: socialism.

### ***3. Here and now***

What does all this mean in practice, in the here and now?

It means not dodging key political questions precisely at the point where socialists have a hearing for them.

Dodging key political points because we're not ready to argue for them, is not only selling the working class and the oppressed short, it's a recipe for disaster. We've had to face this for too long with the ALP who has claimed to represent

us: Let's show in practice that we are the alternative that is bold enough to tell it like it really is.

It means posing the only real solution to the ten of thousands of jobs being lost across Australia: Nationalisation of these companies, under workers control. If the bosses can't run these companies then we should call for an opening of the books - to really see where the money's going.

The ALP's only solution is to organise the part payment of workers rightful entitlements, or to guarantee access to the dole. This is not a solution to struggling workers and their families - sharing the work around, for full employment and a reduced working week at no loss of pay is the solution.

In the Refugee Action campaigns socialists should be at the forefront of arguing for no immigration controls and full citizenship rights for all immigrants. As long as the Australian state is able to distinguish between "legitimate" refugees and "illegitimate" refugees, our brothers and sisters across the world will continue to suffer at the hands of their governments and ours.

In the anti-capitalist campaigns in Australia, it means not only opposing police violence, but being at the forefront of organising collective self defence of demonstrations, and calling for the disarming of the police.

Over 400 hundred were needlessly injured at the S11 protests against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne, 200 required a visit to the hospital. We need to take the lead from organised protestors in South East Asia and Europe, organising ourselves into collectively trained, militant and organised self defence.

The Industrial Relations Laws are the bosses' frontal attack on the working classes' ability to defend itself against the erosion of hard fought for working conditions. The laws cannot be amended - they must be smashed.

Socialists should be at the forefront of arguing that the government - along with appointed IR Commissions, or unelected judges - will never be a fair arbiter of disputes between workers and bosses. There should be no separate industrial relations courts and no restrictions on the right of workers to organise.

The only way to achieve any of this is to not only break the law, but with a united working class response to the united attack on behalf of the capitalist class. The only way that we can smash the laws is with an all out, indefinite general strike. This way trade unionists and trade unions cannot be individually picked off. This can and must be built for in every battle against casualisation, redundancies and strike actions. The working class is hamstrung under these laws.

But all this requires organisation - and militant organisation with the right politics.

#### ***4. For a revolutionary workers party***

The immediate task for the Socialist Alliance should be building at the branch level, while being coordinated at the national level. For the branches to be built, and the organisation to grow in membership and influence, requires the commitment of all its members, and involvement in local, regional, national and international struggles. It also means politicising members through education and experience in socialist politics.

The seats in which the Socialist Alliance faired well in Britain electorally recently were exactly those seats where socialists had been key to campaigns and industrial struggles. A socialist organisation will be taken seriously when it shows in practice, not simply on how to vote cards, why socialist ideas are the only ideas that can lead the working class to victory.

The above battles can only be won if we use these opportunities to begin the project of forming a mass, revolutionary workers party. This party would need to be embedded in the organisations of the working class and in the movement against capitalism.

The alternative some in the Socialist Alliance are proposing? An electoral front; a loose organisation that will not tie its leaders to a clear working class program. They argue that workers cannot be won to revolutionary ideas now, and

therefore we should water down our politics in order to attract these workers.

But history shows something quite different. Workers trust in organisations that prove in practice their willingness and capability to fight in their interests. Workers and class fighters appreciate organisations that are honest and upfront about what is necessary to win the battles of our class, not simply wheeling out revolutionary demands when its convenient and without having tested them in practice.

Revolutionaries are judged more by deeds than by words - and our revolutionary program should direct our deeds, openly and honestly.

Simply a loose, electoral alliance? No! The working class needs a fighting party, committed not just to the struggles of today, but to revolution.

This party would have a centralised leadership and know that in battle all its members were fighting for the same overall goal. Its leaders would not be permitted to follow whatever mood took them or speak out against party policy: they would be under the control of the party as a whole.

Through this we can prove those that are rightly cynical about our new commitment to unity, that the Alliance is not a fleeting formation, that we are indeed the organisation not only made up of the working class, but the one that consistently fights in the interests of the working class, unlike Labor.

We call on all members of the Socialist Alliance to join us in the fight to form a new revolutionary workers party in Australia and internationally. We call on members to join us in a caucus to fight for these things in the lead up to, and at, the founding National Conference of the Socialist Alliance.

Now is the time. We can draw hundreds to us if we show the lead.

# A PROPOSAL FOR THE INCLUSION OF A DEMAND AROUND TRANSGENDER RIGHTS IN OUR PLATFORM

By Virginia Brown

**Proposal: that the Socialist Alliance platform of demands incorporate the demand for, “Transgender rights - legal recognition of the gender by which people live”.**

## Note on the proposal:

Capitalism treats gender as a biological reality. *In general*, our roles in life are assigned to us at birth according to our chromosomal status; if it is xx, we are assigned the ‘feminine’ role, if xy, the ‘masculine’ role. From the first legal recognition of these roles on our birth certificates, to, finally, our death certificates, these roles are not supposed to change. Women are supposed to be nurturing, soft, emotional and intuitive, rather than strong, unemotional and logical, the role assigned to men. These roles, however, are *socially* assigned, and crucial to maintaining one of capitalism’s most vital institutions: the family unit.

The family unit, generally conceived as ‘God-given’ or natural, is a historically recent phenomenon, and depends on a segregation of roles along gender lines for its existence. It performs a number of vital functions for our corporate rulers by institutionalising the inequalities in society. These functions include:

- (xi) The provision of essential services being relegated to the family, with the wellbeing of each family member being as much the responsibility of that particular family as possible. With women assigned the role of primary care-giver within the family unit, these services, such as care for the sick, old and young, are all relegated onto the shoulders of women, meaning a lesser share of GDP goes towards social services, and more towards corporate profits.
- (xii) Property ownership being passed onto the next generation by means of the family unit.
- (xiii) The family unit takes care of the future generation of the working class, thus minimizing the expense

for the ruling class of reproducing human labour power.

- (xiv) By perpetuating the idea that women’s role is in the home, the family unit reinforces the idea that women do not deserve to receive equal pay to men.

The family system is a repressive and conservatising institution that reproduces within itself the hierarchical, authoritarian relationships necessary to the perpetuation of the class divisions. It molds the behavior and character structure of children from infancy through to adolescence. It trains, disciplines, and polices them, teaching submission to established authority. It then curbs rebelliousness, nonconformist impulses. It represses and distorts all sexuality, forcing it into socially acceptable channels of male and female sexual activity for reproductive purposes and socioeconomic roles. It inculcates all the social values and behavioral norms that individuals must acquire in order to survive in class society and submit to its domination. It distorts all human relationships by imposing on them the framework of economic compulsion, personal dependence, and sexual repression.<sup>1</sup>

Individual decisions to live one’s life by a gender other than that initially assigned are a challenge to the idea that gender is biologically and not socially constructed, and thus a challenge to the supposed ‘naturalness’ of the family unit.

Individuals making such decisions are subject to widespread derision, prejudice and vilification, and in addition to this, because their gender is legally deemed to be that which was assigned at birth, a man-to-woman may be legally required to use men’s toilets, and if gaoled, sent to men’s prisons.

[Many people, of course, experience additional forms of oppression to transgender oppression, such as indigenous or women’s oppression. For instance, anyone born with xy chromosomes, who now lives her life as a woman, suffers also from women’s oppression; she experiences the oppression of sexist ideologies and institutions: from sexual harassment and unequal wages through to gender stereotyping and physical abuse.]

The end of transgender oppression is thus inextricably linked with the end of women’s

oppression, and must be one of the goals of the women's liberation movements and all organisations aiming to build that movement, including the Socialist Alliance. The addition of a short demand around transgender rights in our platform, thus keeping the thrust of the platform readily apparent while making it clear that we are

an alliance wanting to build the struggle for these rights, is a small but important step in this direction.

*Feminism and socialism: Putting the Pieces Together*, Document of the Democratic Socialist Party, (pp.13-14), (Resistance Books: Chippendale, 1992).

# FROM DECRIMINALISATION OF PERSONAL DRUG USE; FOR SAFE INJECTING ROOMS TO LEGALISATION OF PERSONAL DRUG USE; IMMEDIATE TRIALS OF PRESCRIPTION HEROIN

By Michael Arnold

Over recent years the “drug problem” has become a major focus for social discussion. It has been regularly discussed in the corporate media, different policy options debated, and drug forums, and community consultations have been held in many localities across Australia. In the midst of this discussion, more than 1000 Australian heroin users died of overdose between 1996 and 2000, the Victorian government has plans on the board to build two new prisons and one new juvenile detention centre to respond to overcrowding that has resulted from the prosecution of unprecedented numbers of drug users, and users of different illicit drugs around the country continue to be subjected to poverty, police attention, and discrimination. The attitude that “you can’t fight the system when you’re off you’re face” and a misunderstanding and potential distrust of the emerging drug user activist movement have seen very few organised socialist forces support the demands for democratic rights surrounding the use of drugs for recreation or self-medication. In this light, the decision by the Socialist Alliance NLC to recognise the importance of a demand surrounding drug law reform (and to place it, appropriately, with other demands for human and democratic rights) should be commended, and was one of many factors that led to me recognising the potential of Socialist Alliance, and the importance of supporting it. I would like to argue, however, that the current demand; “Decriminalisation of personal drug use, for safe injecting rooms”, is insufficient, and not in keeping with the socialist nature of the rest of the platform. An article similar in nature to this PCD was published in *Green Left Weekly* 455 if you would like to examine the issues further.

The current legal context – prohibition - surrounding the use of most of our illicit drugs was implemented progressively during the 1960s and early ‘70s, following the construction of United Nations Treaties on Narcotics; Psychotropic Substances; and the Traffic in Narcotics & Psychotropic Substances. Up until this time heroin, and cocaine, could be obtained through prescription, or even in some cases bought over the counter in cough syrups or pain drops. The US-dominated International Narcotics

Control Board (INCB) enforces these treaties, and the government laws and policies that flow from them.

In Australia, drug police is laid out in the National Drug Strategy. The overriding philosophy behind this strategy is “harm minimisation.” Although commonly used as interchangeable, harm minimisation and harm reduction have very different implications. Official harm minimisation contains three pillars: (i) demand reduction (education aimed at stopping people from using, or encouraging people to cut back or stop using; as well as some programs like counselling or job-creation that may reduce the certain impetus that lead some people to use drugs (ii) harm reduction (programs that seek to reduce direct harm to users or community that can be a factor of drug use eg. Needle Syringe Provision & Disposal services, methadone programs etc) and (iii) supply reduction (programs that boost police & customs resources and seek to stop the flow of drugs into the country or a particular suburb). Supply reduction is the most well-resourced of all elements of the strategy. Many users and workers in the harm reduction field believe that supply reduction measures often negate harm reduction work – temporary reductions in purity may result in users substituting with other drugs, vein damage if it’s a drug that’s injected, and additional crime levels as users look for a way to obtain the amount of drug that their body has become accustomed to. This has been highlighted over the last 7 months, as Australia has experienced a heroin drought. While this can only be partially attributed to police measures, it has been a case study of what can happen when supply to an area of a particular drug is reduced.

Three terms are commonly thrown around that tend to embrace the main trends in thought surrounding law reform. These terms are medicalisation, decriminalisation, and legalisation, and I will attempt to explain the main ideas of each.

The first concept I will discuss is Medicalisation. This term refers to shifting drugs from being entirely prohibited to being available through prescription by a medical professional (presumably a GP or a drug 'treatment' specialist).

This is essentially the system trialled for heroin in Switzerland in between 1996 and 2000, and which is now a feature of Swiss medical practice for provision of both heroin and, in a more limited way, cocaine. During the Swiss heroin trials, which involved around 1500 participants, participation in violent crime dropped to 1/7th of its pre-trial rate, with only 1 participant in every 100 committing violent acts. Prior to participation in the trial around 1 user in every four suffered from symptoms of depression, schizophrenia and other forms of mental illness. After one year on prescription diacetylmorphine (heroin) only 5% were affected by these conditions, a figure marginally lower than that experienced in Swiss society generally. Participation in property crime dropped by 1/2 and fraud and dealing dropped to 1/3 of its pre-trial rate. (From WHACK, 1998) These benefits to the community were vitally important in the decision by the Swiss people, in a referendum, to institute widespread heroin provision. However, despite the Swiss program's great success in improving user's health and rates of employment and housing, the short half-life of heroin means that they are required to attend 3 times a day to be dosed. This can be a massive disruption to lifestyle and a severe restriction on their freedom of travel. Australian methadone and buprenorphine users face similar restrictions.

We move now to the option currently included in the Socialist Alliance platform, decriminalisation. This term is generally taken to mean the removal of criminal penalties from the use of illicit drugs. Possession, and growth or production of these drugs, generally only for personal use, is often dealt with in a manner analogous to a traffic laws infringement. The obvious benefit from decriminalisation is that users do not receive a criminal record or face the threat of jail time if found with drugs. However, in most decriminalised systems the state maintains the right to enter your premises or search your person, seize your stash, and you cop a fine for your troubles. In SA and ACT possession and growth of small amounts of marijuana have been decriminalised. The hassles associated with growing your own have meant that the majority of people continue to be reliant on the black market for their pot. Production of fully synthetic drugs such as speed or ecstasy should be done by trained chemists, not in backyard laboratories. The amount of poppy required for making heroin, and the skill needed to turn opium into diacetylmorphine also suggests that production and distribution of opiates would continue more

or less in its current form. Decriminalisation often proceeds from the premise that drugs are dangerous and that citizens need to be protected from them, but that drug use is primarily a medical issue, not a legal one. As noted by Graeme Dunston in a recent Green Left "Decriminalisation is part of the prohibitionist approach." In my opinion, it is unlikely to lead to a fundamental change in the treatment and well-being of drug users, as the black market will retain control of production, and the police will continue to engage in supply control measures.

My preferred option for drug law reform is full legalisation. Legalisation would see the removal of all legal restrictions on access to drugs, with the possible exception of age limits, as these are often applied to legal drugs. At the same time, a whole range of laws may come into place regarding the drugs' production, contents and purity, and point of sale. The most likely form of distribution under a legalised system would be over the counter at pharmacies, or through pubs or cafes. Legalisation recognises the basic human right to control our own bodies and minds. The relevant laws regard protection of the users consumer and medical rights, and are not instruments of social control. There are yet to be many working examples of full legalisation of an illicit drug in the developed world. The INCB generally acts quickly to stomp on any reform agenda, however legal advice provided to the Swiss and to Australian policy reformers suggests that the Convention on Narcotics Control does allow nation states the right to determine their policy on legality if they feel changes will benefit the health and well-being of its citizens. The majority of drug user activists with whom I am acquainted support the full legalisation of illicit drugs used for recreation or self-medication. However, for speed, cocaine & heroin in particular, medically supervised trials that provide the drug to dependent peoples is likely to be a vital first step.

### ***What role for Safe Injecting Rooms?***

The second part of the demand included in the Socialist Alliance platform is "for safe injecting rooms", and this has been one of the main topics of public debate, particularly in Melbourne, Sydney & Canberra in recent years. These facilities, now being referred to as Medically Supervised Injecting Facilities, offer users a safe, sterile environment in which to use drugs they have purchased. While the corporate media has presented these as a panacea, they are far from

being the holy grail of the harm reduction movement. Research, including extensive interviews with users conducted by VIVAIDS as part of the Drug Policy Expert Committee consultative process, suggests that injecting facilities will only ever cater for a very particular group of users - generally dependent, often homeless, or who use away from the home. For these users facilities like the one recently established in Kings Cross, and which have functioned in Europe for 10 years, offer a great opportunity to inject somewhere where the risk of virus transmission is minimal, where you can receive attention if you overdose, and access other services if needed. These centres would not, however, really be necessary if users were receiving controlled, regular, and affordable doses of their drug of choice. Overdoses - one of the main harms the centres overcome - affect a majority of users alone and in their home. This can be the result of a sudden rise in purity or, most often, a situation where the user has taken sleeping pills and/or alcohol to reduce withdrawal symptoms while waiting to score, or to supplement the effects of poor quality heroin. Affordable heroin can free users from the poverty

traps that result in homelessness, and would allow users to take their drugs in a safe way in their preferred environment - the comfort of our own homes. MSIF's are an important step, but hopefully the need for them will be short.

My proposed alteration to the Socialist Alliance platform would read "Legalisation of personal drug use; immediate trials of prescription heroin." I feel this is a balanced demand. On the one hand it calls for something - heroin trials - that has already had viability studies and cost estimates completed. The trials could be quickly implemented, thus giving us a demand where the chance for victory is very good. It is probably fair to say that many dependent heroin users are the most oppressed, most downtrodden and most frequently arrested of any drug users. Heroin trials can provide immediate relief from crippling financial pressures, poor health, and the need for petty crime. At the same time by calling for legalisation we recognise the need for more far-reaching reform, for the right of all individuals to control their bodies, regardless of drug of choice, and we seek to remove a tool of social control from the state arsenal.

## SUGGESTED PRIORITY PLEDGE

### By Workers' Liberty

The Socialist Alliance is standing to allow workers to use their vote to express their rejection of the pro-profitier policies of the mainstream parties and support for a workers' plan to rebuild Australia.

Tax the rich and slash the defence budget to establish free, universal provision for health and education; quality care for children, the aged and people with disabilities; cheap and expanded public transport; and other public services. End government funding of private schools, hospitals and health insurance. Fund Medicare, not private health funds. Axe the GST.

Every worker should have the right to join a union and oblige their employer to recognise and

negotiate with the union. Unions should have the right to gain access to workplaces, to inspect company plans and books, to strike, to picket effectively, and to act in solidarity with other unions or social causes.

For a democratic Republic with representatives receiving no more than a skilled worker's wage. Negotiate a Treaty recognising prior ownership and Indigenous land rights. Full rights for refugees and asylum seekers.

Cut work hours without loss of pay, and nationalise companies threatening mass job cuts; guarantee everyone the right to a secure job at a living wage. Production should be organised for human need and ecological sustainability. Replace the rule of the free market by workers' control and democratic planning for social need.