

PRECONFERENCE DISCUSSION BULLETIN

The founding conference of the
Socialist Alliance in Australia

Number 8

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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" in "Socialist". 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.

REVISED DRAFT OF THE SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

PLATFORM

By the National Convenors

The following version of the draft platform is being put forward by the National Liaison Committee as the basis for the discussion at Founding Conference around the platform. It is an attempt to simplify debate by incorporating some of the suggestions that have been put forward in the preconference discussion bulletins to date, while retaining the general spirit of the platform

There are two new sections, “For Women’s Liberation” and “Against Australia’s Imperialist Foreign Policy”, while the “Free the Refugees” has been expanded and now also includes demands on migrant rights. “Open the borders” has been moved to the section “Fight Corporate Greed”

It is not intended to reflect the majority view of the National Liaison Committee, and no weight should be put on the inclusion or otherwise of any specific proposal in the draft. As this draft will now be the basis of the discussion at the conference members should consider this draft when considering what amendments they might wish to put to the conference.

Changes introduced into the original draft platform are in bold.

The Socialist Alliance stands on a platform of total opposition to the profit-driven economic rationalist agenda of social austerity, privatisation and deregulation. By empowering communities and redistributing the wealth of society we can create jobs, expand public services, and improve welfare and services

Millions of us face **declining services**, transport chaos, low pay, job insecurity, homelessness, racism, **sexism** and environmental destruction., while the tremendous wealth of Australia is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority. Only by ending the concentration of power in the hands of that minority can the wealth that exists be used for the benefit of working people. Every major industry should be re-organised on the lines of social provision for need-publicly owned, and democratically controlled by the workers and the community.

The Socialist Alliance will stand candidates in the next federal election to give a voice to working class struggle, to the need for working-class political representation. We will stand to offer an alternative that Labor is not. We recognise that on issues such as th GST, health, education, Labor is offering far less than what traditional Labor voters want. The Socialist Alliance stands in complete opposition to the racist and right-wing Pauline Hanson's One Nation party.

If elected, a Socialist Alliance candidate would reject the perks and personal pay-outs of parliamentary office and take only an average workers wage. In parliament, Socialist Alliance candidates would use their position to give a voice to workers struggles and social movements, fight reactionary policies and promote the mass campaigns that can defeat the attacks on jobs and living standards.

A movement for change must be built by developing policies, campaigns, industrial struggles and co-operation with all workers, environmental, anti-racist, and other social movements and to put forward an alternative to corporate control of society.

A sustained mass campaign of total opposition to the ruling class offensive can bring together the forces to replace capitalism with a socialist society, based on co-operation, democracy and ecological sustainability.

SCRAP THE GST, TAX THE RICH

- Tax the rich and slash the defence budget to fund free universal provision for health, education, and **care of children, the aged or people with disabilities.**
- Free tertiary education; **cancel the HECS debt**
- Free quality childcare
- Repeal the GST and introduce a highly progressive system of taxes on incomes, profits and wealth of the rich - reverse drastic reductions in business taxation of recent years
- Free quality aged care
- Increase social security benefits **to a living wage**, no work for the dole, no mutual obligation.

PUBLIC NEED NOT CORPORATE GREED

- End government funding of private schools, hospitals and health insurance.
- No subsidies to wealthy schools.
- Fund Medicare not private health funds
- Expand public services
- **No to privatisation, keep Telstra under public ownership. Reverse the privatisation of Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank, airports, electricity, CES and Centrelink**

FULL UNION RIGHTS

- 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.

- Repeal anti-union laws - the Workplace Relations Act and sections 45 D and E of the Trade Practices Act.
- No individual contracts
- **Stop the attacks on workers compensation, increase the entitlements for injured workers**

FIGHT CORPORATE GLOBALISATION

- For international solidarity, to gain union rights, basic public services, and a living wage for workers around the world
- Cancel Third World debt. **Withdraw Australia from the WTO.** The agents of global capitalism, the WTO, IMF and World Bank must be replaced with a global plan of economic reconstruction to end poverty
- Promote peace and international co-operation
- **Open the borders**

FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY

- For a democratic Republic with representatives receiving no more than a skilled workers wage
- End racist harassment of Aborigines and ethnic groups
- Disarm the police to stop police killings
- Decriminalise personal drug use; for safe injecting rooms, **and prescription heroin trials**

FOR WOMEN'S LIBERATION

- **Full reproductive freedom. Repeal abortion laws. Guarantee access to abortion services. Lift the ban on RU 486 (mifepristone, the abortion pill). End legalised discrimination against lesbians and single women seeking access to medically-assisted conception**
- **Fully funded refuges for women and children escaping physical or sexual abuse**
- **No cuts to women's services**
- **Equal pay for comparable work. Affirmative action to ensure access to non-traditional jobs**

END DISCRIMINATION

- Repeal all laws that discriminate against lesbians and gays. Full equality for same sex couples.
- End all discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, **religion**, gender, age, disability and political ideology
- Equal pay for equal or comparative work for women, young people, Indigenous workers and people with disabilities

FOR ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Money for public transport, **not freeways**
- Effective action on greenhouse gas emissions; develop renewable energy sources;

- No uranium mining, no reactor; no logging old growth forests; no genetically modified organism (GMO) crops or field trials
- Worker - community - green alliances to counter profiteering developers

SOCIAL JUSTICE FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

- Repeal Howard's ten point plan and extend native title, restore the right to veto mining on Indigenous land
- Negotiate a Treaty recognising prior ownership and Indigenous land rights;
- Increase funding for and **Indigenous** control of community services;
- Abolish mandatory sentencing;
- Full compensation for the Stolen Generations

FREE THE REFUGEES, MIGRANT RIGHTS

- Close the detention centres, end mandatory detention
- Full rights for asylum seekers **and migrants. Abolish the two year waiting period which prevent newly-arrived migrants accessing social security**
- **End all deportations**
- **Remove all restrictive and discriminatory immigration regulations. Abolish the pro-business "points" system**
- **Funding and specialist services for resettlement**
- **Unlimited and free English classes**
- **Grant permanent residency status for refugees and abolish the temporary protection visa**

AGAINST AUSTRALIA'S IMPERIALIST FOREIGN POLICY

- **Stop Howard's military expansion; no military ties with repressive regimes**
- **Solidarity with Indonesia's peoples, not its military and police**
- **End ANZUS**
- **For a nuclear free Pacific**
- **No to APEC**

JOB NOT PROFITS

- Shorter working week with no loss in pay; nationalise companies that threaten mass sackings and guarantee workers' entitlements;
- Stop casualisation; **for full employment with real jobs**
- Stop **national** competition policy massacring jobs
- For industry-wide agreements. No trading off of jobs and conditions.
- **All workers to have access to an Award**

PRIORITY PLEDGES FOR SOCIALIST ALLIANCE - AN AMENDED LIST

By Ian Rintoul

National Convenor

Scrap the GST, tax the rich to fund welfare and services

Action against poverty: increase all pensions and benefits to a living wage; restore child-care subsidies

Restore funding to public education; scrap the HECS debt; no subsidies for rich private schools

reverse privatisation; keep Telstra in public hands

a fully funded and independent ABC

Treaty Now for justice and reconciliation; increase funding for Aboriginal communities for jobs and services

implement original Kyoto protocols on global warming, no nuclear reactor, stop uranium mining, stop logging old growth forests

no to Star Wars missile program; cut military spending. No military ties with the US

increase funding for Medicare, no subsidies for private health companies

repeal all anti-union laws

No to racism, sexism and homophobia; active opposition to discrimination and harrassment

cancel third world debts to Australia; withdraw from the WTO

close the detention centres; end the mandatory detention of asylum seekers

stop casualisation and outsourcing; 35 hour week to create real jobs; end work for the dole

repeal all anti-abortion laws

DRAFT CONSTITUTION AS ADOPTED BY JULY 27

NATIONAL LIAISON COMMITTEE TELEPHONE HOOK-UP

The following draft was endorsed unanimously as the National Liaison Committee position at its July 27 2001 hook up.

NAME

The name of the organisation shall be the Socialist Alliance, hereinafter referred to as "the Alliance".

DEFINITIONS

2.1. *Financial Member.* A financial member is a member of the Socialist Alliance who has paid the membership dues for that year.

2.2. *Oppressed Group.* An oppressed group is any broadly defined section of the population that suffers discrimination within capitalism based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, age and/or disability.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

3.1 The Alliance is a coalition of socialist parties and socialist individuals supporting a common action platform for the purpose of endorsing candidates to contest elections for local and state government representatives and for the federal House of Representatives and the Senate. The Alliance will also seek to build campaigns around the demands of the action platform, involving trades union and communities, pensioners, Aborigines, and migrants really need.

3.2. The Socialist Alliance shall stand candidates to give a voice to working class struggle, and meet the need for working-class political representation.

3.3. The Alliance seeks to build a movement for change by developing policies, campaigns, industrial struggles and co-operation with all workers, environmental, anti-racist, and other social movements and to put forward an alternative to corporate control of society. A sustained mass campaign of total opposition to the ruling class offensive can bring together the forces to replace capitalism with a socialist society, based on co-operation, democracy and ecological sustainability.

3.4. In parliament, Socialist Alliance representatives would use their position to support workers' struggles and social movements, fight reactionary policies and promote the mass campaigns that can defeat the attacks on jobs and living standards

ACCOUNTABILITY OF SOCIALIST ALLIANCE PARLIAMENTARIANS

4.1 The Socialist Alliance does not allow its parliamentarians to exercise a conscience vote. As they have been elected on the basis of the Socialist Alliance platform they are required to vote in accordance with that platform and publicly advocate it.

4.2 Socialist Alliance parliamentarians shall be accountable to the national conference of the Socialist Alliance, and in between conferences, parliamentarians shall be accountable to the national executive.

4.3 If elected, Socialist Alliance candidates shall pledge any income above the average of a skilled worker to the Alliance to help fund its work..

MEMBERSHIP

5.1. Any individual who broadly agrees with the aims and objectives of the Alliance and agrees to participate in the non-sectarian, co-operative spirit of the Alliance is eligible to join. Membership fees for 2001 shall be \$50 high waged, \$20 waged, \$10 unwaged, \$5 high school student per year.

5.2. The Socialist Alliance encourages full participation of all members as activists and leaders at local, state and national levels of the organisation and as candidates and branch officers. The Alliance actively encourages working class women, indigenous people, immigrants, queers, people with disabilities and young people to take on leadership roles within the Alliance.

5.3. The Socialist Alliance is politically pluralistic and encourages all individuals and encourages all individuals and perspectives to participate fully in our struggle for a socialist society and in our way of working as an alliance. Members of other parties, organisations and groups who join the Socialist Alliance are expected to be able to keep their identity as members of these organisations whilst participating fully in the development of the Alliance.

5.4. To further this end, membership assumes a commitment to a non-sectarian and co-operative way of working, looking to build unity, positively supporting and encouraging the notion of alliances and ensuring that any critical debates are conducted in a positive manner and without personal attacks.

5.5. Once decisions have been taken by the elected bodies of the Alliance all members are

expected to present that decision as the position of the Alliance, both in public and in dealings with other political organil Alliance members and affiliate organisations are free to indicate their agreement or disagreement with any Alliance decision.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

6.1. Policy shall be decided democratically by an annual National Conference or by Special Conference. These conferences shall be open to all members but decisions shall be made by delegates proportionally representing the membership of local Alliances. Conference decisions shall be by show of delegate cards and by simple majority.

6.2. Delegate ratios shall be decided by the National Executive (or in the case of the inaugural National Conference, the National Liaison Committee) after consultation with local branches and district and state-wide bodies.

6.3. National Conference shall elect a National Executive, and any national officeholders and national bodies.

6.4. For 2001-2 the national officeholders shall be three national convenors. The national convenors, to be elected out of the incoming National Executive, shall be elected by the same slate method as for the election of the National Executive. Proposed slates for the national convenors can only be nominated after the election of the incoming National Executive.

6.5. The National Executive for 2001-2002 shall be elected according the following formula:

- Two representatives from each of the larger affiliates;
- One representative from each of the smaller affiliates;
- One member from each state or territory not covered by the representatives from the existing affiliates.
- Any affiliates joining the Socialist Alliance after the conference shall be accorded representation on the National Executive, at the invitation of the National Executive.
- Between conferences, if necessary, proxies to the National Executive may be (i) appointed by the affiliated group in the case of a representative of an affiliated group, or (ii) in the case of a representative of a state elected by a state-wide meeting or the relevant state co-ordinating committee.

6.6. Method of election of National Executive for 2001 - 2002:

The following method of election shall apply for the National Executive election for 2001-2:

- The National Executive shall be elected by slate;
- Any conference delegate shall be eligible to present a slate;
- Nominations of slates shall be open from the beginning of the conference and close at the end of lunchtime on Sunday, August 5, 2001.
- All slates nominated be available for scrutiny by conference;
- Nominees may decline nomination if they so wish;
- Voting shall be by show of hands;
- If no slate receives a majority of votes in the first round of voting, that the slate with the least number of votes shall drop off and further rounds of voting conducted until one slate gains a majority.

6.7. If one third of the paid-up membership requests it by petition to the National Executive, a Special Conference of the Alliance shall be called in addition to National Conferences

6.8. The implementation of policy and new activities between Conferences, and the organisation of annual and any other Conferences, shall be carried out by National Executive, and any national body constituted by the National Conference.

6.9. The National Officeholders and National Executive shall be accountable to the National Conference and to any Special Conference called for the purpose of considering their actions.

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE AND NATIONAL OFFICEHOLDERS

7.1. The National Officeholders and National Executive shall be responsible for the running of the organisation and for finance, membership, arrangements of meetings, communications with local groups and individuals, national bulletin production and distribution, liaison with other groups and organisations, and arrangements for seeking and enabling electoral registration7.2.

The National Executive has the power to appoint other officers of the Alliance where required to fulfil its duties as outlined in this constitution.

7.3. The National Executive has the duty to canvass the broadest possible consensus within the Alliance on all important matters.

7.4. The National Executive shall meet, in face or by phone, at least every two months. It shall coordinate election campaigns nationally and shall allocate specific national tasks such as media liaison and the development of draft policy documents in specific areas.

7.5. Individuals acting on behalf of the Socialist Alliance nationally, or the National Executive,

should regularly report the substance of their work to the National Executive.

LOCAL BRANCHES

8.1 The basic unit of the Socialist Alliance is the local branch. A branch shall have at least seven members and will be organised on the basis of federal electorates. All Alliance members will be assigned to a branch by the appropriate district organizing committee (see below) or in the case of remote regions, by the national conveners. Members will normally live in the area of covered by their branch, but in other cases may indicate to the district organising committee or the national conveners, the branch in which they will be active.

8.2 A properly convened branch meeting which achieves a quorum can make decisions for the branch. Decisions shall be made by show of hands or by simple majority. The quorum at a properly constituted branch meeting is 5 members or 10%, whichever is the greater.

8.3. Branches shall elect office bearers, including a Convener, Treasurer and Returning Officer, annually. Office bearers can be voted out at any properly convened Branch meeting.

8.4. 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.

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

STATE, DISTRICT AND CITY-WIDE ORGANISING COMMITTEES

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

9.2. State-wide or city-wide conferences sranch, with affiliate organisations who are not represented by branch-elected delegates also eligible to nominate a representative.

CAUCUSES

10.1. Any oppressed group within the Alliance shall have the right to form a caucus. All members the Alliance who are part of a particular oppressed group shall have a right to participate in a caucus if it is formed.

10.2. Any individual member or affiliate organisation shall have the right to form such 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.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNS AND PRE-SELECTION

11.1. Branches shall pre-select the candidate for their area/electorate. Nominations shall be called 14 days before a scheduled branch meeting. The Returning Officer 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 Branch. The pre-selected candidate shall be the person with the most votes.

11.2. Branches shall also be responsible for their own election campaign including raising finance to nominate candidates and production of material (above and beyond whatever common election material that can be provided centrally). 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.)

11.3. Senate, state upper-house and city-wide candidates shall be preselected by state or city-wide conferences of the Alliance called for this purpose with 14 days notice.

11.4. In the event of disputes about candidates within or between branches or affiliate organisations the National Executive shall have the final say.

AMENDMENTS

12.1 Amendments to this Constitution shall be made by simple majority vote of the National Conference

BY-LAWS

13.1 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 for ratification.

DISSOLUTION OF THE SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

14.1 The Socialist Alliance may be dissolved by a special conference called for this purpose by the national executive, or a by one third of the

membership (as above). Any assets of the Socialist Alliance will be distributed to any organisation or organisations having aims consistent with those of the Socialist Alliance as determined by such a special meeting or

conference. The delegate ratio for such a special conference may be no less than the delegate ratio used for the last properly constituted national conference.

AN ISO PROPOSAL ON PREFERENCES

By David Glanz

Candidate for Wills

As the outbreak of civil war among the Liberals over their approach to One Nation in WA shows, preferences are a hot topic. By allocating preferences, a party signals its philosophy and priorities to potential supporters.

That is why the Socialist Alliance will always preference Labor ahead of the Liberals--we are not neutral, we want to see the Liberals trashed, and we want to establish common ground with Labor-voting workers who are not yet convinced of supporting us.

How then do we deal with the question of the Greens?

Comrades from Workers Power say that we should preference directly to Labor ahead of the Greens (bulletin #6). They argue this on the basis of Labor's historic links to the organised working class.

While formally correct, this approach misses the political dynamic of the period. The rise of the anti-capitalist movement has found an electoral echo in the rise of the Greens vote.

Notwithstanding the middle class nature of the Greens, many young people--and some workers, too--are voting for them for leftwing, radical reasons.

Clearly, we want to win such voters over to us. We will do so primarily by arguing for our platform and by supporting or initiating campaigns that bring Greens supporters into action alongside us. But we can also send them a signal that we are on the same side in the fight against neo-liberalism by preferencing Greens ahead of Labor.

Should we give a blank cheque? That is effectively the proposal from comrades in the DSP in their amended resolution (bulletin #7). The ISO disagrees on a number of grounds:

1. We should adopt the same approach in both the House of Reps and the Senate. We cannot be for a Labor victory in the lower house and neutral in the upper. Dick Nichols of the DSP argues (bulletin #2) for preferencing the Greens "even though Green preference policy might

conceivably place one more Liberal and one less ALP hack on the Senate benches". What message does this send left-leaning Labor supporters, or even the best of the Greens whom we hope to win over?

Dick also says that we should adopt a different approach in the Senate because we need more Bob Browns. But not every Greens lead Senate candidate is going to be a Bob Brown--in Victoria the lead candidate is a small (organic) businessman of, so far, unproven quality. We need a preference policy that can take into account the political stance of the Greens candidates.

2. We should take into account the Greens' preference strategy. The Aston by-election campaign committee voted to preference the Greens, but reversed that decision when the Greens split their preferences. It was absolutely right to do so. While the Greens apparatchiks were playing electoral poker with Labor, many voters were disgusted that the Greens could risk helping a Liberal victory. On one booth in Aston, a Greens activist was so furious with her party's decision that she cut her how-to-vote cards down the middle and threw away the pro-Liberal half.

Bob Brown argued to me that, despite his party's stance, we could still preference Green 2 and Labor 3 to keep the Liberals out. He was technically correct but politically wrong. If we had preferenced the Greens, it would have sent a clear message to our supporters that we endorsed their strategy and were indifferent to whether the Liberals won. Post-Aston, no one could accuse us of colluding in the Liberals' narrow victory, while Labor supporters are furious with the Greens and Democrats.

Accordingly, the ISO is moving the following motion:

This founding conference of the Socialist Alliance resolves:

1. *That our candidates will preference progressive left candidates first, then Greens, then Labor. In all cases we put One Nation last. This policy applies in all elections, federal, state or municipal.*

2. *That our support for Greens is conditional on both a) The pro-working class credentials of their*

candidates, and b) The Greens preferencing to Labor ahead of the Coalition.

3. Whether or not candidates are deemed to be "progressive left" or "pro-working class Greens" shall be determined by the local branch, or by a

state or territory conference in the case of the Senate or where there is no local branch.

4. That where there is no Alliance candidate, progressive left candidate or Greens candidate who meets the provision of point 2, we call for our supporters to vote Labor.

ON THE AMENDED DSP PROPOSAL ON PREFERENCING

By John Tully

*Socialist Democracy and delegate, Melbourne
West Socialist Alliance*

I have been out of the country and when I returned was off line, so perhaps the point below has been addressed elsewhere.

I note the DSP's amended position re preferencing. I have no problem with it generally, but would draw attention to the bit about putting One Nation last.

Again, I have no problem with this, but what about the

(by no means hypothetical) case where out-and-out fascists also stand? The most probable bunch of nasties are the LeRouchites, the CEC, although it is possible that National Action might stand somewhere.

Clearly, in that case, relevant SA organisations should put the fascists last. I would suggest that the DSP's amendment be amended to read:

"As a general rule, we put One Nation candidates last, except in cases where outright fascist candidates also stand."

WORKERS' LIBERTY PROPOSAL ON PREFERENCES

(This proposal amends and replaces our proposal in DB no. 6)

Vote 1 Socialist Alliance

Second preferences to the ALP, with exceptions as follows.

In preferencing non-ALP 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:

- (i) That the candidate or the ticket endorses the repeal of the WRA and sections 45D & E of the Trade Practices Act;
- (ii) 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;

(iii) That they will not do trade-offs for environmental gains that give away or silence them on supporting workers' rights;

(iv) That they will preference Labor, not the Coalition. Split preferences are also unacceptable.

In preferencing any other left party or independent candidates in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, we need to establish 3 points with the candidate or party:

1. That the candidate or party subscribes to conditions 1 and 4 outlined above, ie advocate repeal of anti-union laws and direct preferences to Labor.
2. That the policies of the candidate or party do not contradict SA policies in the main;
3. That the candidate or party is not campaigning against the SA (e.g. Communist Party of Australia).

We should offer to *not* run against Labor candidates who undertake publicly to be committed to:

1. Repeal the Workplace Relations Act and sections 45D&E of the Trade Practices Act;
2. Support union campaigns, even if they come into conflict with a Labor government;

3. Oppose 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, or any other far-right/fascist candidates. Second (or subsequent) last preferences go to the Coalition

DISAFFILIATION FROM LABOR

From the International Socialist Organisation

To provide a home for all those disaffected with Labor and for the many others that undoubtedly will be in the future is part of the *raison d'être* of the Socialist Alliance. There is growing discontent among Labor's traditional supporters. Labor's core working class vote has been declining for the last two or three decades.

In the federal arena, over and over again, people wanting to see a fight against the Liberals have been disappointed by Labor's failure to take a stand on almost anything. On significant things like public health and education, Labor even backed the Liberals' subsidies to rich private schools and private health insurance companies.

The disaffection has been re-inforced by the experience of recent state Labor governments. In NSW, unions had to mobilise to stop Bob Carr privatising power. In Victoria, Steve Bracks backed the police at S11 and threatened power workers with Kennett's anti-union legislation when they took wildcat action to protect jobs. Public servants are now in dispute with the Victorian government.

So the election results this year in Western Australia and Queensland revealed a massive anti-Liberal vote that wasn't matched by a similar enthusiasm for Labor. As others in earlier discussion bulletins put it – it was an anti-Liberal, rather than a pro-Labor vote.

The thousands of workers that blockaded the NSW parliament in the fight against the Carr Labor government's attacks on workers' compensation was a most graphic indication of the potential audience for the Socialist Alliance. Labor's failure has left many workers open to the need to build a socialist alternative to Labor.

It is in this context that union disaffiliation from Labor has become an issue. A number of unions, most significantly the firefighters' union, voted to disaffiliate (at least while Bob Carr was still premier) from the NSW Labor Party over the issue. Although it was a mass meeting of the firefighters that endorsed the proposal to disaffiliate, in every case the move to disaffiliate has come from the officials.

In this respect the officials' move to disaffiliate, just like those in the 80s, was a cover for their refusal to initiate the industrial action necessary to win the fight against the Labor government. Disaffiliation can also be an excuse for refusing to fight politically. Rather than use the unions' affiliation to the Labor Party to galvanise opinion and opposition to a Labor government's attack on workers, disaffiliation becomes an individual gesture that potentially weakens the industrial fight and poses no alternative political organisation for the unions.

While the unions' officials motives are no different this time, the political mood is significantly so. In the 80s there was massive disaffection with Labor, under the impact of the Accord and the first attacks of the Hawke and Keating governments, but the political climate saw rapidly declining industrial militancy and falling union membership.

Now there is a significant mood to the left. There was almost unanimous support at the firefighter mass meeting to disaffiliate because there is a widespread feeling that even if workers vote for Labor, it is no longer "their" party. (That this feeling can also be pulled to the right can be seen in the fact that One Nation gets a hearing among a minority of workers.)

While the creation of the Labor Party by the trade union officials was an historical step forward, our attitude to disaffiliation has to take account of both the officials' motives in promoting disaffiliation, and the developing new political mood.

What should the Alliance say about disaffiliation?

Thousands of workers are looking to the left of Labor. The action platform is our key weapon to win support among those workers and politically posing a socialist alternative. Allowing disaffiliation to be a defining feature of the Alliance would be an obstacle to another essential element of the Alliance project ie to be a bridge between the left and reformist workers. The development of the Alliance as an alternative to Labor will crucially depend on its success in winning adherents among those that still look to Labor. Counterposing the Alliance to Labor over

the issue of disaffiliation would be counterproductive to this task.

In outline then, our position should be (i) we should not advocate disaffiliation from Labor; (ii) when disaffiliation is raised as a counterposition to industrial action, we should point out that counterposition and argue for the industrial action and the political mobilisation that can win (iii) we can promote discussion concretely by proposing support for the Alliance on the basis of the Alliance platform.

A proposed model motion for Socialist Alliance members to use to begin that discussion follows:

Model motion: Six years of Coalition government has seen dramatically declining living standards while job security and union rights have been attacked. Removing the Coalition government and reversing its pro-market policies is an urgent task of the union movement.

We note however that the Beazley opposition has failed to offer a real alternative to the policies of the Coalition. Specifically it is not proposing to

scrap the GST or to entirely repeal the Workplace Relations Act. Rather than unequivocally supporting public education and public hospitals, the Labor opposition has supported the Liberals providing massive subsidies to private health companies and the richest private schools, while public schools are starved of funds.

State Labor governments like the Carr government in NSW have been responsible for attacks on workers' fundamental rights and pursuing policies of privatisation and outsourcing that has cuts jobs and services.

We therefore believe that in the coming federal election (this union/workplace) should provide financial and political support to pro-worker candidates that stand for fighting for the unions' policies of full union rights and to restore the welfare and services cut by the Liberal government. We will therefore invite Socialist Alliance candidates and representative to address union and workplace meetings. We will also donate (and recommend that the union) donates \$XXX to the Socialist Alliance campaign.

WORKERS' LIBERTY ON DISAFFILIATION

Resolution

We are for political representation of the collective interests of the working class. We are for discussion and debate within the unions about the platform and policies of parties seeking to represent working class interests, and for union endorsement of the SA platform wherever it can be achieved. Whilst the ALP betrays workers in their unions whenever there is industrial struggle, there is no evidence to suggest that under current conditions militant unions will win any greater advance for working-class interests by splitting away from the more conservative and apathetic unions than by using leverage in ALP structures to try to rally them. Unions that disaffiliate cut themselves off from the struggle for political representation in the absence of a broad struggle for an alternative socialist platform to that of the ALP. We oppose disaffiliation of affiliated unions from the ALP. We urge unaffiliated unions to affiliate to the ALP and fight within it.

Rationale

Since the ALP provides the only direct and structured political representation for the unions, the SA should actively promote union affiliation to the ALP on the basis of key union demands such as: repeal of anti-union laws, repeal of the GST, reintroduction of a heavily progressive taxation system that taxes the rich to finance free health and education, a shorter working week with no loss in pay, and maintaining workers' compensation rights.

Unions resolutely committed to their own demands and continuing to campaign for them both industrially and within the ALP can have a much deeper political effect on the rest of the

labour movement, than by campaigning *without* affiliation. This is the best basis at the moment for developing a class struggle left-wing set of political demands within the union movement, and challenging the reformist politics that dominate the ALP.

It is a fantasy to think that any significant union bodies are likely to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance in the near future. When unions endorse the SA platform, then it is likely to have far bigger political impact if they take it into the ALP than if they simply disaffiliate without a battle.

Disaffiliations from the ALP have taken place periodically. While they may reflect healthy disgust with ALP policies, and they are of no political merit in and of themselves. They may be an expression of anger, or even a convenient decoy by ineffective union leaders, posturing to make it look as though they are taking action. The danger of disaffiliation without any accompanying adoption of political demands or campaign to win other unions to such demands, is that unions end up being *less* rather than more open to the necessity of seeking political representation.

Union support for SA challenges to the ALP in elections should be sought on the grounds that the ALP has been unresponsive to union demands and that therefore, while continuing to challenge the ALP leaders and to use the ALP structures to try to rally other unions, the union has a right and a duty also to use the public electoral arena to promote working-class interests and demands.

WORKERS LIBERTY PROPOSAL ON ELECTION CAMPAIGNING

Resolution

The Socialist Alliance will campaign to be the voice of working class struggle in the elections by focussing on:

- (v) *working in support of existing organising and campaigning bodies, such as unions and community groups*
- (vi) *establishing ongoing dialogue with potential supporters, to win both their vote and their membership of the SA.*

Accordingly branches are encouraged to give priority to ensuring that they:

- (vii) *Seek to speak at meetings of rank and file unionists and community groups about the SA platform,*

finding out about and offering solidarity to their campaigns.

- (viii) *Produce targeted leaflets for local campaigns, actions and workplaces, wherever possible in consultation with local activists who have yet to join the SA*

- (ix) *Doorknock for SA election candidates, treating the questions asked on doorsteps as valuable feedback for developing SA election material, and following up on people who are interested in talking further.*

General campaign leaflets, street stalls, speak outs and letterboxing whilst important should not eclipse these other methods which will enable us to make deeper connections with potential supporters.

OPEN THE BORDERS! A REPLY TO TONY DEWBERRY

By Paul Benedek

Parramatta Socialist Alliance, and Democratic Socialist Party

This PCD is a refutation of comrade Tony Dewberry's arguments (PCD #3) for dropping the Alliance's call for "Open the borders". Since that time, other comrades, in support of the 'open the borders' position, have proposed a wording change to "Remove all restrictive and discriminatory immigration regulations" to clarify what open the borders would mean. I support these proposals. Regardless of the wording, I believe it is crucial that the Alliance maintain the political position of supporting open borders. Comrade Dewberry begins by arguing that "unlike other demands in the draft program this one [open the borders – PB] is a maximum demand i.e. its realisation is achievable only under socialism." There are two distortions in this argument.

Open the Borders – unachievable under capitalism?

Firstly, how is the demand to "Open the borders" (ie end all restrictive and discriminatory immigration regulations) *unachievable* under capitalism? Yes, capitalism would be hurt, it profits from having scapegoats and having super exploitable migrant and refugee labour, but there is nothing fundamental about immigration law to capitalism. Imagine Ruddock or Sciacca scrapping immigration legislation (crazy as it sounds) - would the system really come crashing down?

No. Opening the borders, removing restrictive immigration laws, while undermining capitalism's racist profiteering, would be far less chaotic for the social system than Ruddock would have us believe. There would be an increase in immigration, particularly at the beginning, but that would taper off. As a refugee defender in Britain summarises (*Green Left Weekly* #457) "Studies have shown that even if you liberalise immigration laws dramatically, there would be an immediate rush of people coming here, but then it would fall off. You would have much the same level of migration that exists now. Immigration law doesn't really have a very big effect on migration levels, but on the status of people once they're here."

Another example is the East Timorese. Many came to Australia fleeing the Australian-backed

Indonesian invasion and occupation of Timor (of course, Howard wanted to deport them). Now, with East Timor free of the Indonesian military, yet still totally impoverished and decimated, the overwhelming majority of East Timorese have voluntarily given up a far higher standard of living they could have in Australia, to return to their home, East Timor.

This gives the lie to the idea of millions shopping around for the best country. Most people do not like to leave the country they have grown up in – for reasons of culture, language, friends, family, and many others. Opening Australia's borders would not, contrary to Ruddock's intimidatory and scapegoating propaganda, see endless "floods of migrants", nor social chaos (that's what Liberal and Labor are about!). What it would do, which I believe the Alliance should support, is guarantee equal rights for all those who come to Australia, undermining the governments ability to use refugees and migrants as scapegoats and super-exploitable labour.

Is open the borders really different?

The second distortion is that 'open the borders' (or, presumably, 'remove restrictive and discriminatory immigration regulations') is qualitatively different from other demands in the platform.

Is this demand really extreme in comparison to others in the platform? For example, would the capitalist class be far less willing to grant open borders in Australia, than to see 3rd world debt cancelled; or to see a highly progressive taxes on profits and wealth of the rich & the reversal of cuts to corporate tax.; or a living wage for workers around the world?

Open the borders & a higher migrant intake – mutually exclusive?

Dewberry asks "if we are for open borders, then how can we call for a higher migrant intake, a higher refugee intake?...These are all problems that will have no meaning if the borders are open." Well, I might ask an analogous question – "If we are for free tertiary education, then how can we argue for ending upfront fees?...this will have no meaning if tertiary education is free." But we can argue for these things because the borders are NOT open, tertiary education is NOT free. Dewberry's arguments imply that we can only have an immediate demand (increase refugee intake, end upfront fees), or a longer-term demand (open the borders, free tertiary education), but by

no means both. Of course, the two are not exclusive – on the contrary, they are both necessary.

Does the Alliance wait for a ‘world without borders?’

Dewberry’s next point begins by asking “Do the refugees have to wait until we have won a world without borders to come to Australia?.....We let the government off the hook completely if we link the entry of refugees to some future utopian condition.” Firstly, as argued above, ‘open the borders’ is not ‘utopian’, and Dewberry should not confuse the issue by talking of a “world without borders”, when (although I think the SA would like to see a *world* without borders) the demand refers to *open the borders* that our state has control of – ie Australian borders. But this is an aside.

The important point is that Dewberry’s argument would only go close to holding *if SA’s sole policy on refugees was “Open the borders”* – but it is not. Thus the only person linking entry of refugees to a “future utopia” is Dewberry himself! The SA, however, calls for **Close the detention centres, Full rights for asylum seekers, funding for settlement**. And, quite the opposite of ‘waiting for a world without borders’, SA members have been key to national protests against the detention centres. ‘Open the borders’ has in no way hampered our ability to put forward more immediate demands, but it has also allowed us to take up deeper discussions with those interested in socialist solutions to the refugee crisis.

Is UN law enough? In the same section, Dewberry states “The concrete problem we face is that the Australian government is not meeting international human rights obligations that exist under international law, here and now, even in a world with borders.” It’s true that the government is not meeting international obligations regarding refugees, and here might be a case for an extra demand (*not a substitute*): “For full compliance with the UN Refugee Convention”. However, the refugee problem will *not* be solved simply by complying with UN law (though it would be a good start). For starters, the UN does not recognise economic refugees – therefore a starving Iraqi woman, who has had her two

children die from malnutrition, is not a legitimate refugee under UN law, as she does not face political persecution. The SA should go far beyond UN human rights, and this is just what the ‘open the borders’ demand does.

Why Open the borders? This PCD has argued against removing “Open the borders” (or “remove restrictive and discriminatory immigration regulations”) from the SA platform. But why should we *keep* it?

1. *It undermines nationalism and racism.* Why should anyone have more right to this (or any other country) than anyone else? Why should we oppose more working people coming to Australia, when it’s the bosses here and overseas who are screwing us all over (but screwing those in the third world over far worse)?
2. *It’s a demand that has support beyond socialists.* Dewberry argues that the open borders call “is out of place in any section where policies are needed that address the pressing needs of some of our potential supporters - migrant workers and refugees.” My experience in the refugee campaign leads me to the opposite conclusion – that the *value* of SA having ‘open the borders’ (or similar) in its platform is in *how it resonates with our potential supporters – migrant workers and refugees*. These people have families, relatives, friends, and fellow country people still locked out of the wealthy fortresses that are the first world countries. The real solution is to break open these fortresses to have the wealth distributed justly around the world – until we win that, we should argue to open the borders.
3. *It gives socialist solutions.* Why should there be restrictions on peoples movement, and free movement of capital? Many with a liberal consciousness are against the camps, yet what solutions do they have? The SA has a solution – free movement of people – a solution that undermines imperialism, the division of the world into the few rich countries and the many impoverished. It’s a solution we should keep, and, where possible, popularise.

COMMENT ON CHRIS SPINDLER ON JOBS

By Riki Lane

Chris Spindler has presented "ideas for a Socialist Alliance jobs policy" in the Alliance's *Preconference Discussion Bulletin 3*. They contain some good proposals. The shorter working week with no loss of pay is vital; so is expropriation of companies which threaten mass job cuts. I'd add: expansion of public services (and therefore of useful public service jobs) through taxing the rich and big business; and workers' control over reorganisation or reconversion of industry.

But I think two of Chris's proposals - a freeze on tariffs, and the Tobin Tax - weaken the program rather than strengthening it. The proposal for a small percentage tax on foreign-exchange transactions, made by the very mainstream US economist James Tobin, is certainly more welcome than calls for cuts in public-service spending, or increased indirect taxes on working-class consumers. We do not need to hector or denounce Tobin Tax supporters. But should we throw our weight behind them.

The Tobin Tax it is neither a realistic interim 'quick-fix' to be effective, it would have to be implemented by every major government in the world acting simultaneously, or else foreign-exchange business would simply move to sites without the tax nor a step towards mobilising the working class against the bosses, nor a fundamental challenge to the privileges of

capital.

If the working class were strong and coordinated enough worldwide to enforce the Tobin Tax, then it would be strong and coordinated to focus on measures much more central to class relations and it should do so. As for the tariffs proposal, Chris partially answers it himself.

"Increasing tariffs doesn't work. In the 1930s tariffs were at their highest ever and still one third of the workforce was unemployed. It's not the workers overseas that should be targeted..." He also rejects the call to "buy Australian".

But tariffs as a means of job-saving are inseparable from "buy Australian". They are supposed to do by market incentives what "buy Australian" campaigns do through moral incentives - funnel demand to Australian-based firms rather than overseas-based ones, and thus hopefully make those Australian firms maintain or increase their workforces. And if increasing tariffs doesn't work, why should we think that freezing tariffs at their existing levels will?

At the very best tariffs save a few jobs in import-threatened industries in Australia, short-term, at the expense of workers outside Australia (and maybe of workers in export-oriented industries within Australia). They are no long-term solution. And they cut directly against the international workers' unity which, as Chris points out, is essential to a successful fight for jobs.

SOCIALIST ALLIANCE AND THE LEFT PRESS

By Chris Slee

Wills Socialist Alliance, Melbourne

The left press plays an important role in building Socialist Alliance. Many people first became aware of SA through reading about it in Green Left, Socialist Worker or other left papers.

The left press also plays a role in informing SA members of national and international developments, and promoting discussion of political theories, strategies and tactics.

It would be preferable if Socialist Alliance had its own paper, which could carry the information and discussion currently carried by the different left papers. But this is still some way off. The press of parties belonging to SA can to some extent fill this gap.

There is no fundamental incompatibility between circulating the left press and building SA. On the contrary they are complementary.

Nevertheless, concerns have been expressed by some SA members that the sale of left papers at SA meetings could give a bad impression to new members. It is argued that new members, seeing left paper sellers competing with each other, will get the impression that SA is divided.

There could be a small element of truth in this, though I think the problems are far outweighed by the benefits of giving new members access to the information and discussion contained in the left press. If the general tone of the meetings is one of comradely collaboration, paper sales at meetings will not undermine this.

The absence of a Socialist Alliance newspaper creates a gap on Socialist Alliance stalls. We have

no SA publication to give to people who want a more in-depth understanding of what is happening in Australia and the world. Again, this gap can be filled by selling the press of parties belonging to SA. I think that each SA stall should sell copies of all the left papers whose supporters are participating in that particular stall.

It is also important to distribute the left press at picket lines. For many workers, this is one of the few situations where they have the free time to actually read a left paper. It would be wrong to leave workers with nothing to read but the bourgeois press.

While SA should facilitate the distribution of the left press, it should try to do so in a way that minimises the impression of competition.

For example, suppose that members of both the DSP and ISO are visiting a picket line as part of a Socialist Alliance group. Instead of one person handing around Green Lefts and the other distributing Socialist Workers, one person might say: "We've brought you some socialist newspapers to read" and hand around copies of both GL and SW.

In the longer term, the ideal solution would be for SA to have its own newspaper and for existing left papers to cease publication. The united paper, while focusing mainly on supplying information and putting forward ideas that we share in common, should also have a section devoted to the discussion of differences.

This ideal solution is not an immediate prospect. In the meantime, the existing left press plays an essential role, but sellers should be conscious of minimising any possible problems.

NO SHORT CUTS TO SOCIALISM

By Bernie Rosen

Burwood Socialist Alliance

Parliamentary elections serve several purposes for Marxist parties. Engels attached great importance to them. Elections are a time when public interest is focussed on politics. It affords socialist candidates with the opportunity to present and explain our policies to the people. The voting result is an indication of our public support.

There are two aspects that merit special consideration. They are both related.

Communist Party members were elected to responsible positions in some unions because union members were convinced that their policies and efforts were of benefit to them.

The same principle applied to local government elections in some municipalities. In Queensland Fred Patterson, a Communist candidate was elected to the seat of Bowen in 1944 and 1947 as a direct result of the service that he had rendered the electors over a number of years.

Election to parliament enables the socialist parliamentarian to use this forum to expose the government's reactionary policies and present an alternative to them. A parliamentarian has a free travel pass that enables the member to do Party work and address meetings wherever needed. Public support is secured by taking up the peoples problems in the electorate.

Consistent locality work is well within the capacity of a socialist party. Participation in local government is also an essential aspect of party work that cannot be by-passed. The average voter will assess a political party by his or her perception of what the Party has done for them regardless of how correct our policies are on East Timor, Indonesia, Palestine, Israel or Iraq.

Supporting or initiating a campaign for a bus shelter or for opening another branch of a municipal library may seem trivial, but it is still a component of the big picture.

The second aspect to consider is the perception of socialism that the ruling class has implanted into the public mind. They have used Stalinism and its crimes for this purpose. It is an obstacle that it is hard to overcome. The ruling class and their ideological defenders and stooges are very selective when identifying and relating crimes to economic systems. They would never dare to identify the crimes of Fascism with capitalism but they are quite willing to do this for socialism, which they erroneously depict as communism.

The tasks of showing the working class that our policies emanate from their needs and aspirations is within the orbit of both the objective conditions and subjective capacity of the socialist movement and its members.

A suitable role model of how socialism can operate in countries like Australia and New Zealand has not yet evolved. We have still the difficult task to demonstrate that our conception of socialism is the antithesis of Stalinism, and that our objective is to secure a much higher measure of democracy and freedom than we have experienced before.

In order to bring the record to date, we have to state with regret that we thought Glasnost (openness) and Perestroika (restructuring) would give socialism a new lease of life.

Russian Communist Party renegades assisted by the international forces of reaction have temporarily triumphed over a disillusioned working class. Now of course the Russian people realise that they are worse off under capitalism than they were under socialism.

If they would have removed their renegades from office and replaced them with honest and competent Marxists and continued with restructuring socialism would have provided a much better way of life for them.

A positive result emanating from this failure is our cognisance of the pitfalls to avoid when the objective conditions eventually materialise for the construction of socialism..

PROPOSAL BY WORKERS' LIBERTY ON HOUSING POLICY OF SOCIALIST ALLIANCE

By Melissa White

on behalf of Workers' Liberty

It seems to me that the housing policy for the Socialist Alliance proposed by Brigitte Ellery and Alison Thorne in Discussion Bulletin 3 has three problems.

First, it omits what should be the most immediate and revolutionary demand on this question — the confiscation of the luxury dwellings and offices of the rich, and their conversion to social use. To build new public housing — presumably mostly in the remote outer suburbs, if the private property of the well-off in the inner suburbs is not to be touched — is not adequate (however good the public transport), and slow.

Second, it is too long and detailed by the standards of the other sections of the platform. Some of the details are ideas which can really go without saying, given the rest of the platform. Brevity is better, where it is possible.

Third, some of the details are unnecessarily bureaucratic and unworkable. For example, Brigitte and Alison assume private landlords will remain. I think that's right. A workers' government would neither want, nor need, nor even be able to abolish small-scale private renting. But then Brigitte and Alison propose an impossibly bureaucratic system for regulating rents — "a maximum of 20% of income". Fill in a tax form every time you pay your rent? All it could do is make small-scale private renting impossible, or drive it into a black market. The better way to guard against high private rents is to ensure that everyone has the option of publicly-provided housing at an affordable rent (say, no higher than 20% of minimum income).

I would suggest instead:

State governments should be mandated to guarantee decent, affordable housing to all by:

1. Confiscating luxury properties owned by the rich and big business, and converting them to social use;
2. Building new public housing. We support tenants' struggles to stop the privatisation of existing public housing, and to win improved tenants' rights.

It would be dogmatic to take our cue too directly from what Engels wrote in "The Housing Question" over 100 years ago, but recent experience in France — where there is much more homelessness than in Australia, and a big homeless movement — is instructive. The sharp point of the struggle has been the "requisitioning" of luxury properties by the homeless and their supporters. What Engels wrote was:

"It is not our task to create utopian systems for the arrangement of the future society... but one thing is certain: there are already in existence sufficient buildings for dwellings in the big towns to remedy immediately any real 'housing shortage,' given rational utilization of them. This can naturally only take place by the expropriation of the present owners and by quartering in their houses the homeless or those workers excessively overcrowded in their former houses. Immediately the proletariat has conquered political power such a measure dictated in the public interests will be just as easy to carry out as other expropriations and billetings are by the existing state.... In the beginning, however, each social revolution will have to take things as it finds them and do its best to get rid of the most crying evils with the means at its disposal. And we have already seen that the housing shortage can be remedied immediately by expropriating a part of the luxury dwellings belonging to the propertied classes and by quartering workers in the remaining part".

AN ABC OF, BY AND FOR THE PEOPLE

By Cam Parker

Marrickville Socialist Alliance

Broadcasting is an important medium through which the right to freedom of expression is realised in a modern society. With publicly funded media increasingly under attack by hostile neo-liberal governments, important alternatives to the big-business, transnational media monopolies are in danger. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation is no exception to this global trend.

The ABC is funded under provisions of specific pieces of legislation, and its funding has been progressively reduced by successive Labor and Liberal governments. Since the early 1990s a cumulative total of \$120 million has been cut from the ABC. In 1996, when the Liberal Party came to power, an extra \$55 million was sliced from the ABC.

With an eye on countering a rural backlash in this year's federal election, the government has tied an "extra" \$17.8 million per-year (for four years) of ABC funding exclusively to rural and regional "initiatives".

Clearly the government is attempting to meddle in the program making decisions of the ABC and undermine its editorial independence. It puts into question sections of the ABC's charter — a document spelling out the broadcaster's roles and commitments to the Australian community, recognised at a legislative level — obliging it to be free of political bias.

The ABC's independence, too, is also under question as governments routinely appoint people to the ABC governing body, the ABC board, whose views are in line with its own. In theory this board is independent of the government, even though Donald McDonald, the "good friend" of the PM's, is its chairman, and ex-Victorian Liberal Party president, Michael Kroger, and even the Australian Stock Exchange CEO are members.

The Howard government's current stacking of the ABC board continues the long Labor and conservative government tradition, since 1932,

of interference with the workings of the national broadcaster, accompanied by a healthy dose of budget cuts and/or threats of their imminent imposition thrown in for good measure.

This meddling is further exacerbated with the appointment 18 months ago of ex-Young Liberal Jonathan Shier. His recent delaying of a *Four Corners* program casting new light on dubious activities of high-level Liberal Party figures, put into further question in whose interests he is managing the national broadcaster: the public's or an increasingly paranoid Liberal-National coalition federal government.

As the main union, the CPSU, at the ABC pointed out: "the Board has failed to protect the ABC and its editorial independence and has failed to adequately protect the non-commercial nature of the national broadcaster...It has overseen yet failed to act on the dismantling of production capacity in TV, and the diversion of funds away from program making and the areas that support program making."

Inquiry into the ABC Board

In late June 2001, the Senate voted to set up an inquiry into the methods of appointment to the ABC Board "that would enhance public confidence in the independence and representativeness of the ABC as the national broadcaster."

This is an opportunity for the Socialist Alliance to put forward, in a practical way, its opposition to the corporate media monopoly in this country and for it to articulate a program for the democratisation of one of the most important cultural institutions in this country. Written submissions are due by August 9.

An outline for change

There are some key aspects that need to form the basis of any submission:

- The current board's membership is narrow and subject to governmental nepotism. The Socialist Alliance should articulate strong opposition to the historical practice of "jobs for the sibs" and propose legislative changes

around the goal of *publicly electing* all members of the board. I propose that there be two representatives per state and one each for the territories, half of which elected on alternating, three-yearly terms (a Senate model). Other government bodies' boards are publicly elected, most notably the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.

- The managing director exercises too much control over the organisation. The MD should be *removed* from the ABC Board and have observer status only at Board meetings.
- Staff-elected representation on the board should be *doubled* (to two) to better reflect the diverse range of interests and skills of those 4000+ people who make up the ABC.
- The ABC Advisory Council — a body publicly nominated yet appointed by the ABC board — should be widened and be made up of several regional and metropolitan sub-councils as well as “expert” panels. They should be given genuine advisory powers that exceed the current toothless “consultative” role that is all but being ignored by the current board.

The Democrats

Senator Vicky Bourne already has a private member's bill about ABC governance awaiting a final vote in the Senate. Although the Australian Democrats (rightly) view funding cuts to the ABC as an essential part of the “problem”, their proposal is inadequate in one very important area.

In the draft bill, they want to see greater scrutiny of appointments to the ABC board, with a joint-party Senate committee, rather than the Cabinet, having the power to make recommendations to parliament as to who should get the nod. As well, any hearings on these matters would be held in camera (secret).

For the governing body of a public institution to continue to be decided behind closed doors is unacceptable. The Democrats are mistaken in thinking that the current political duopoly in Canberra can somehow come up with a “compromise” solution. The only ones excluded from such a compromise are the Australian public itself.

Decisions about who should govern publicly funded institutions need to be taken out of the hands of politicians and decided by those who are most affected by such decisions. In the case of a national public broadcaster, that is the people themselves.

Funding

According to ABC broadcaster, Quentin Dempster, ABC funding has been cut by 34% in real terms over 15 years. In the last 10 years 2000 broadcasters have been axed! Under Shier — that is, in the last 18 months — 30% of TV producers in NSW have been made redundant with only 10 researchers at the ABC studios in Sydney's Gore Hill.

Labor Party communications spokesperson Stephen Smith has only committed his party to offering the ABC an extra \$100 million over three years. This amounts to just over 40% of the \$240 million needed to restore the cuts imposed by the Coalition.

Clearly, other funding models need greater discussion. Given the outrageous levels of profits in the commercial communications industry in Australia, a 2 per cent tax on their advertising revenues would go a very long way in ensuring a future for public — and community — broadcasting>

Resolution

That the Socialist Alliance make a submission to the References Committee of the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee on relation to the Senate Inquiry into appointments to the ABC Board. That this submission be based on recommending legislative changes that: determine the membership of the Board be publicly elected; that the managing director has no voting powers on the Board; the staff representation be increased to two; and the Advisory Council's role and makeup be broadened.

That part of ABC funding be sourced from taxes on the advertising revenues of the commercial telecommunications and media industries.

RESOLUTIONS

ON CHOGM

From Ipswich/Inala Socialist Alliance

We, members of the Ipswich/Inala branch of the Socialist Alliance call on the Founding Conference of the Socialist Alliance to condemn the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and further resolve to have an obvious presence at the unity march on October 5 and support protests on October 6.

We note the following and as such should condemn the forum.

- CHOGM is a forum committed to breaking down barriers to free trade like labour and environmental standards;
- CHOGM delegates will make up 40% of the delegates at the next World Trade Organisation meeting in November;

- CHOGM's agenda is no different from the WEF that met in Melbourne, or the WTO meeting in Seattle;
- CHOGM will be discussing the implementation of the General Agreement on Trade in Services – an agreement to hasten the privatisation of health, education and public transport; and
- CHOGM is part of the imperialist structure that suppresses indigenous people.

Moved: Kevin Wilson

Seconded: Shirley Cawley

Passed unanimously

ON COLOMBIA

From Alejandro Rodriguez and Susana Rivas

Considering that Colombia at the present time is one of the many victims of the U.S. government's biggest military intervention and taking into account that thousands of people are being killed every year as a result of this military intervention, the Socialist Alliance should adopt a resolution that:

1. *Calls for an end to any kind of U.S. intervention in the internal matters of Latin American countries, particularly Colombia.*
2. *Puts pressure on local governments to stop any support for foreign military aid to the Colombian Security Forces, which are the biggest human rights violators in the Americas.*
3. *Demands that foreign countries' armies - such as the United States' and Britain's- stop sending mercenaries to companies that*

contract their pilots and military personnel to be part of the Colombian Security Forces.

Rationale: These demands should be put forward considering that the targets of the imperialist aggression are the popular movements, mainly the Revolutionary Armed Forces Of Colombia -The People's Army (FARC-EP), the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the different Union movements which have had 59 of their members killed this year. The U.S. aggression should cease as both popular guerrilla movements have demonstrated their willingness to end the armed struggle through a process of negotiations that lead to peace with social justice and a new government of reconciliation and reconstruction.

Current peace dialogues are not being taken seriously by the Colombian State nor the U.S. In this way, a statement in support of the peace process between the Colombian Government

and The FARC-EP as well as with other guerrilla groups will increase the pressure on the government to continue the peace process. It is necessary that the government stops using violence as a lever to blackmail and hinder any

developments arising from the peace dialogues and negotiations in order to find a peaceful solution to the internal armed conflict and the economic problems of the country.

RESOLUTIONS OF THE NATIONAL LIAISON COMMITTEE

1. National Finances

That an account of national Socialist Alliance finances be included in conference kits.

2. Membership records

To adopt the following procedure to ensure the Socialist Alliance has accurate and up-to-date membership records at all levels:

- Local groups to enter their membership on an Access data base [see NSW as model for data required, but also including middle names of members] and to send copies of these to state (or territory) and national liaison committees;
- State (or territory) liaison committees to produce state/territory membership databases (in Access) on the basis of the membership data received from local groups

and from any memberships entered directly via state/territory or national liaison committees;

The National Liaison Committee to produce a national (federal) database (in Access) on the basis of data received from local groups and state/territory liaison committees, and this to be made available to both local groups and state/territory liaison committees for the purpose of checking the accuracy of records

3. Discussion bulletin

That the internal discussion bulletin of the Socialist Alliance continue after the Founding Conference; that it shall be published at least quarterly except in the quarter preceding the next National Conference, when it shall be published as frequently as needed.