

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

Volume 3 Number 4

April 2003

\$2.50



NB: The deadline for resolutions for Second National Conference is midnight, May 4 2003

DOCUMENTS

Open letter to the ISO: stay in the Alliance and fight for consistent working class politics <i>By Janet Burstall, Workers' Liberty</i>	3
Greetings and resolutions from the Socialist Alliance Tasmanian State Conference	4
Request for assistance in distributing Open Letter <i>By John van der Velden (Canberra branch)</i>	6
Reply to John van de Velden from Socialist Alliance National Conveners	6
Request to Socialist Alliance affiliates to publish Open Letter <i>By Michael Morphett (Sydney North branch) and John van de Velden (Canberra branch)</i>	7
List of signatories for "Developing the common Socialist Voice" at April 21	7

DISCUSSION

Endorsement for the Open Letter ("Developing the common Socialist Voice") <i>By Dave Riley (Brisbane branch)</i>	8
Letter regarding amalgamation of socialist parties <i>By Bernie Rosen</i>	8
Further Discussion on Israel-Palestine <i>By Bernie Rosen (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)</i>	10
Initial assessment of Socialist Alliance's NSW election campaign <i>By Lisa Macdonald (Parramatta branch)</i>	12
Building Socialist Alliance through the anti-war movement <i>By Graham Matthews (Batman branch) and Vanessa Hearman (Wills branch)</i>	13

RESOLUTIONS AND AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTIONS FOR THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Proposed amendments to the Alliance Constitution <i>By Workers Liberty</i>	15
For an Alliance monthly newspaper <i>By Workers' Liberty</i>	15
Proposed amendments to the foreign policy section of the Socialist Alliance platform <i>By Riki Lane, Workers' Liberty</i>	16
Brief comments on the paper 'Rebuilding democratic, militant unionism —Socialist Alliance and the Trade Unions' <i>By Alison Thorne (Wills branch)</i>	17
Draft resolutions to give effect to "Putting socialism on the Australian political map" <i>By Dick Nichols (National Co-convenor)</i>	18
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Draft resolution on relations with the Greens• Draft resolution on Socialist Alliance finances• Draft resolution on socialist education• Draft resolution on Socialist Alliance stalls• Draft resolution on aiding Alliance growth and recruitment• Draft resolution on developing a united Socialist Alliance intervention in the movements• Draft resolution on membership system• Draft resolution on policy development• Draft resolution on publication on socialism• Draft resolution on relations with left organisations presently outside the Alliance• Draft resolution on publications	

CIRCULAR FROM NATIONAL CONVENER

Making sure members are aware of pre-conference discussion	21
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DOCUMENTS

Open letter to the ISO: stay in the Alliance and fight for consistent working class politics

By Workers' Liberty

18 April 2003

The ISO is seriously considering pulling out of the Socialist Alliance.

The advantages they expected are not there. There have not been dozens, let alone hundreds of independents ready and willing to be activated in a broader left "electoral united front". This did not happen in the 2001 Federal election, and has not changed a great deal during the subsequent state elections, NSW, Vic and Tasmania.

The post-mortem on electoral weakness is not helped by the Democratic Socialist Party's (DSP) dogged Pollyanna insistence that the Socialist Alliance is making fantastic strides when it gets less than 2 percent of the vote, and often less than 1 percent in state and federal elections.

The DSP's organisational machine is far more efficient and effective; the DSP's commitment to the Socialist Alliance has enabled it to mobilise DSPers behind and within the Alliance. Saturday morning DSP stalls, selling *Green Left Weekly* have been renamed Socialist Alliance stalls, without any real change in who staffs them or their operation. Since *GLW* is the only weekly paper published by an Alliance affiliate, no affiliate can compete with the DSP in its ability to present both its own face and that of "the Alliance" simultaneously.

Does the DSP respect the difference between itself and the Alliance? No. Does the DSP sometimes claim to speak on behalf of the Alliance when really it is speaking for the DSP? Yes!

Has the ISO in the Alliance complained about the DSPs blurring of the boundaries? Yes. Has the ISO presented an overall alternative more democratic mode of operation? No. Has the ISO challenged the DSP's taken for granted politics by proposing alternative policies, and addressed these to the ranks of the Alliance? No.

If the ISO quits the Alliance by the end of May, arising from its present reassessment, this will not solve the ISO's stagnation and impotence that has dogged it within the Alliance. It will be quitting without a conscious and clear battle for its own politics having been fought with the DSP, or for a more constructive alternative for the left and the Alliance. This would seem to be because the ISO entered the Alliance without a clear and conscious perspective for what they could achieve through it in the first place. To leave without a fight for what the ISO believes is right, will further demoralise ISO members, many of whom will feel that the whole experience was a mistaken waste of time. Perhaps the problem though is, that if anyone in the ISO has any worked out perspective for what they think is right for the Socialist Alliance, no one outside the ISO seems to know what it is.

The ISO entered the Alliance with an expectation that there were thousands of angry Labor voters out there, just in need of a vehicle to send a message to the ALP.

This, the ISO argued, was reason to keep the message simple, non-revolutionary, just advanced reformist, sine this would enable the Alliance to bring these thousands of people on board. The ISO's claimed perspective for the Socialist Alliance "an electoral united front" is ill conceived for at least two reasons.

1. It has been to treat voting in parliamentary elections as if it were an action campaign, seeking to win particular demands or changes. But the politics of government is not like that - it is programmatic, all-encompassing, not at all like typical united front, single or limited issue campaigns. Parliament/government politics are about a ruling ideology, the fact that political parties represent a holistic approach to the country, and class relations, not just individual reforms. In fact the central problem is that *none* of the political parties represents the interests of the working class as distinct and counter-posed to the interests of capital. Therefore they all accept current class relations, and cannot be trusted as political representatives of working class interests. It is a misunderstanding of the political/governmental arena to think that persuasive participation in it can be reduced to a list of good reforms, without expressing a conscious conception of the class nature of political representation. Politics IS about political programs, in fact, not about specific good ideas, but how they might be made to work. Program cannot be avoided for successful participation in parliamentary politics.

2. Even *if* thousands of new, non-affiliated, dissatisfied ex-Labor voters flocked to the Alliance, on the basis of a terrific list of reforms, how would the Alliance then be equipped to educate, organise and cohere them? What would then constitute a project that was going somewhere, that would not be just more of the same? In fact, there are hundreds of non-affiliated, inactive members of the Alliance, and so the question is not abstract. How will we gain their active and continuing commitment to a socialist project? The DSPs organisation of its own prior activities as if they are Socialist Alliance activities is obviously not drawing in a significant number of non-DSPers to Alliance activity. But the ISO's perspective of *only* electoral work for the Alliance leaves these non-affiliated members with nothing useful to do as part of the Alliance in between elections, does not integrate the need for working class political representation with campaigns and struggles between elections.

So, what *could* the Alliance be achieving? Dick Nichols of the DSP has very conscientiously provided a very thorough perspectives document. It outlines how the Alliance could proceed to become more like the DSP.

Perhaps we all want to make the Alliance in our own image, DSP, ISO, WL, only larger and more effective. But our "own images" are part of the barrier between the Alliance affiliates.

The ISO's main insistence has been that the Socialist Alliance *not* be a regroupment project, and that it primarily limit itself to electoral matters. Inevitably other matters have found their way onto the Alliance agenda. But the ISO history that I am aware of indicates that sorting out ideas has never been a staple of its activities, certainly not in relation to the rest of the left, and from its approach to the Socialist Alliance, not there either. So what does the ISO think is the role of ideas in the struggle for socialism? The ISO seems to wish that it could just be activist, as militantly as possible as the mood of the period allows, without having to mess around wasting time with the rest of the left. Indeed when it was possible in the early 1980s to organise rank and file leftists in the ALP the ISO didn't want to do that either. And the ISO's willingness to work with rank and file groups in unions has often been conditional on there being no electoral challenges for union office.

All in all, it adds up to a picture of the ISO being shy to really pursue its ideas in any forum where they could be forcefully or intelligently challenged. This is unfortunately a basis for sectarianism in the sense of refusing to engage with the real movement. The ISO generally prefers the word "sectarian" to mean smaller than the ISO, and also the insistence on debating ideas.

Unfortunately this also means that where the ISO tradition has had the weight (especially its fraternal organisation in Britain) it hasn't hesitated to throw that weight around, in much the same manner as the ISO feels that the DSP is doing in the Socialist Alliance.

The rules of engagement need to include—engagement with ideas, taking your own ideas seriously enough to propose them, and your opponent's ideas seriously enough to understand them. And all this needs a thorough dose of democratic conditions for debate. That means listening to people with whom you disagree, it means trying to understand what your opponents mean, instead of trying to limit their time and places for speaking, publishing etc.

The ISO needs first to clarify its own perspectives for a socialist organisation, taking into account much longer term factors than the mood of the period, and taking into account the role of ideas in unifying, committing and guiding socialist activity. While the ISO does not address these issues, and talks vaguely about regroupment in terms of working together on activist campaigns, such as anti-war and refugees, it is not taking left regroupment seriously at all. That is not where ideological differences will be sorted out at root. They will simply be manifested

and re-manifested in tactical disagreements about how those campaigns should proceed.

In terms of mass campaigns, especially labour movement campaigns, the DSP tends to emphasise counter-posing itself to the (ALP dominated) union leadership by presenting ultimatums for action of the DSP's own preference, rather than working to develop access to support and help leading activists to convince union members and ranks of the need for a certain course of policy and action to be fleshed out by them. The ISO's approach to recent campaign issues, such as relating to Labor for refugees and the NSW workers compensation campaign has been much closer to Workers' Liberty's approach to these issues. We would like to be able to ally with the ISO in some debates in the Socialist Alliance—on an insistence that socialism comes from below; that socialism can only be made by the organised workers; that Stalinism, even in its Cuban variant, represented no kind of socialism; that we must orient patiently towards the mass labour movement, not thinking we can bypass it by means of this or that radical current on the streets.

Workers' Liberty urges ISO members to hold off on disaffiliation from the Alliance and to give serious consideration to:

- What commitments would a party of and for working class struggle need to make in Australia today?
- What is the ISO's alternative perspective for contributing to creating such a party, if the ISO opposes the Socialist Alliance becoming a left unity project rather than an "electoral united front"? (and if the answer is "build the ISO" how is that not a recipe for sectarian self-isolation?)
- What are the underlying issues and differences between the ISO and the other Alliance affiliates, and what program of discussion could help to clarify and resolve these?
- What organisational conditions and structure for the Alliance would make it possible to continue to work together, whilst allowing both the Alliance and affiliates to continue to make progress and promote their own ideas?

We urge you to put forward your answers to these questions in the Socialist Alliance, so that we can engage with you on them, and make some progress towards reducing the political divisions on the left, as a prerequisite for and aspect of increasing organisational unity. ■

Greetings and resolutions from the Socialist Alliance Tasmanian State Conference

[This conference was held on April 5-6, 2003, at Chalmers, Launceston. Below are some of the greetings to the conference, resolutions adopted and the agenda.]

Greetings from Jack Munday

Best wishes for a successful conference. I applaud the direction of conference towards "left unity" and as far as

possible, avoid the sectarianism which has haunted the left and socialists, communists in the past.

Likewise, the other theme of "environmentalists and socialists working together" is essential, if indeed, the planet is to be saved. We cannot continue to plunder the non-renewable resources in the manner we have destroyed them for the last 50 years.

The need for socialist renewal is long overdue. Corporatism and globalisation have seen the giant transnational corporations use the world like a chess board, and Australia's rights have been greatly reduced.

Socialism is the only long term answer. Therefore your conference assumes real importance to keep the socialist flame burning because there will not be a future for humanity—as well as other species—if we cannot win socialism.

Greetings from the International Socialist Organisation

Comrades,

War has a way of shining a spotlight on political life, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of political parties.

The ALP leadership has bitterly disappointed the many Labor members and voters who are opposed to this illegal, immoral and unjustified war. Simon Crean's craven and very public shifts between various pro and anti-war positions has highlighted his lack of principle. For tens if not hundreds of thousands of erstwhile Labor supporters, this is a final straw.

The Greens have been the main beneficiaries of this disgust. They have made a major contribution to the anti-war movement by their courageous public stand against the war. But the fact that their politics is ultimately rooted in an acceptance of the system and of the Australian state has thrown up some contradictions which may well come back to haunt them the more they grow. So only last week Senator Bob Brown successfully moved a resolution in the senate to call for the withdrawal of Australian troops—coupled with support for them in this and future deployments.

The Socialist Alliance has been completely consistent and principled in its approach to this war. We have opposed it from the beginning, called for the return of the troops, called for the lifting of the UN-imposed sanctions, and have supported a military defeat for Coalition imperialism.

Around the country our branches have campaigned, raised the issue in elections, joined rallies and speakouts, and organised meetings.

This is an excellent record that we can and must build on. The profile and prestige of the Alliance will increase as we unite with everyone opposed to this war in action. Alliance branches need to be working with Labor and Green supporters in peace groups and unions and show in practice that our ideas and initiatives can take the movement forward.

In this regard, the ISO is proud to have proposed to the Alliance that we campaign against the upcoming war budget. This campaign sits well with the initiative to call on opposition parties to block the budget. But it does not rest simply on that one proposition—we can and must organise alongside everyone opposed to this budget and to increased military spending, including welfare groups, leftwing Labor figures, Greens, unions and rank-and-file workers in health, welfare and education.

Medicare not missiles, welfare not warfare—the Socialist Alliance can make a distinctive pro-working class contribution to the resistance to Howard's war on Iraq and his war on workers.

The International Socialist Organisation sends its greetings and hopes for a successful state conference.

David Glanz, National Executive

Greetings from the Freedom Socialist Party

Dear Tassie comrades

Greetings to your important State Conference this weekend—we are sorry that we are unable to send a representative but are pleased that we will have a comrade visit Tasmania over the May Day period.

The Socialist Alliance is an important initiative which has achieved much on the electoral front in its short two year life. Your own achievement of putting Socialist on the ballot in Tasmania is but one stunning example.

The Socialist Alliance is an important united front. We are now starting to form caucuses—a significant development—in several unions. We are also having a real impact as a strong anti-imperialist/socialist voice in the anti-war movement challenging pacifism and those who peddle illusions in the United Nations. This collaboration needs to be continually fostered.

May you have a productive and democratic conference and we look forward to collaborating with as many of our Tassie comrades as possible on our upcoming visit to Tassie and at the National Conference.

Alison Thorne, Freedom Socialist Party

Resolutions adopted by conference

Resolution 1

This conference resolves to pursue every possible avenue to bring the responsible leaders of the "Coalition of the Willing" to answer for their illegal acts in waging a war of aggression against Iraq, including the irresponsible use of landmines and/or cluster bombs in the fore knowledge that such use will necessarily and definitely cause injury and death to innocent civilians. Such continuing acts can already be evidenced and attested to. Therefore the perpetrators must now be brought to trial at the Hague for crimes against humanity.

Resolution 2

While resolving to solicit donations of books that could become part of a left-wing library, the Socialist Alliance Tasmanian state conference encourages members to loan books to other members and supporters.

Resolution 3

That the Socialist Alliance Tasmanian state conference resolves to establish both an email discussion group for members and a better functioning announcement list of members and supporters

Resolution 4

That conference directs conveners of the Launceston and Hobart branches to actively solicit articles for the Socialist Alliance newsletter from members outside of Launceston and Hobart and that the newsletter be published electronically

Resolution 5

That this conference resolves to endorse the campaign priority of the Socialist Alliance to prioritise participation in the campaign to stop the war including

supporting the call for Australian troops to be withdrawn and support for the demand on the senate to block the budget.

Resolution 6

That all resolutions adopted by the conference be published on the Socialist Alliance website and in the next Tasmanian Socialist Alliance newsletter. ■

Request for assistance in distributing Open Letter

By John van der Velden

To National Executive and Branch Executives

11 April 2003

Comrades,

I am writing to request additional assistance in nationally distributing the Open Letter to all non-aligned members of the Alliance.

To date the letter has been sent through the National Executive email system on 29 March 2003, under the sponsorship of National Executive member Michael Morphett, and is due for printing in the next Alliance *Discussion Bulletin*. It is already evident in the brief course of collecting endorsements that many non-aligned members have not yet seen the letter nor are likely to given current distribution methods. Many non-aligned members are not on email and the only additional Branch distributions seem to have been confined to those attending recent meetings. It is also apparent that, based upon those members contacted, a significant majority of members support the core thrust of the letter and want their voices heard on the matter. More importantly, all members welcomed being consulted on this debate irrespective of whether they chose to endorse the letter.

In consequence, they felt a greater sense of empowerment and engagement with the achievements and future course of the Alliance and this can only strengthen our organisation in the period ahead.

It is in the interest of the Alliance as a whole to deepen our democratic culture in the lead up to the May conference, regardless of particular viewpoints within the Alliance over the content of the letter. It is also the right of non-aligned members, as a constituency within the Alliance, to be aware of and have a clear opportunity to respond to the matters raised from within their ranks and on their behalf. Accordingly, I have three requests. Firstly, that the letter with updated endorsements be reprinted in full in all additional *Discussion Bulletins* in the lead up to the May conference. Secondly, that all Branch Executives organise a hard copy priority mail out of the letter (with relevant contact details for Michael Morphett and myself) to all non-aligned members in their Branch. Thirdly, I request a copy of the contact details for all non-aligned members in each Branch to enable a follow up consultation of members response.

Thank you for your consideration. ■

Reply to John van de Velden from Socialist Alliance National Conveners

15 April 2003

Dear John,

We are replying to your letter of Friday April 11, which asks for assistance in distributing the open letter to Socialist Alliance members drafted by yourself and Michael Morphett. As you know, the letter, along with the signatories which had subscribed to it by that date, has appeared in the Alliance *Discussion Bulletin* (Volume 3 Number 3).

We acknowledge that there certainly are problems in some branches ensuring distribution of the *Discussion Bulletin* to all members. Your email and other feedback are making this quite clear. The National Conveners will make every effort to encourage branches to improve this state of affairs in the lead-up to the Second National Conference, stressing that all members must have access to all material being circulated, including your open letter.

Our specific responses to your three requests are as follows.

“Firstly, that the letter with updated endorsements be reprinted in full in all additional Discussion Bulletins in the lead up to the May conference.”

This does not seem really necessary to us and would give your open letter a treatment that all contributors to

the *Discussion Bulletin* could then rightly demand. Moreover, if members have access to one number of the *Discussion Bulletin* they will most likely have access to them all. What we propose is that additional endorsements for the open letter be included in each new *Discussion Bulletin*, with reference to the number in which your document originally appeared (Volume 3 Number 3) and with a note informing members how to get in touch with yourself and Michael Morphett as promoters of the document.

“Secondly, that all Branch Executives organise a hard copy priority mail out of the letter (with relevant contact details for Michael Morphett and myself) to all non-aligned members in their Branch.”

Again, this does not seem really necessary, or even possible. The National Conveners cannot make branches do anything—we can only try to motivate them to do so. And, again, to be fair to every contributor, we would have to ask Branch Executives for all *Discussion Bulletin* contributions to be posted to all members—a prohibitively expensive and time-consuming exercise.

As National Conveners we will stress with branch conveners that it is their duty to the democratic rights of Alliance members to make sure that all members are made aware of all proposals regarding the future of the

Alliance. That is, all branch executives need to be thinking about how to bring the debate within the Alliance to the attention of all members in their branch.

“Thirdly, I request a copy of the contact details for all non-aligned members in each Branch to enable a follow-up consultation of members’ response.”

We will forward this request to all branches. Obviously any member who puts a proposal before the Alliance membership has the right to have access to all members in order to be able to convince them of the correctness of that proposal (see Section 10.2 of the Constitution, “Caucuses”).

We would point out, however, that branches do not necessarily keep databases that classify members by their

alignment. Every member of the Alliance joins as an individual and many branches will have lists that only record basic information (contact details, financial standing etc). Any distribution of your open letter would necessarily cover all members in a particular region.

We will forward this correspondence to the National Executive for consideration at its next meeting and will also include it in the next *Discussion Bulletin*. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us if you seek further clarification.

Comradely regards,
David Glanz, Dick Nichols, Riki Lane ■

Request to Socialist Alliance affiliates to publish Open Letter

By Michael Morphett and John van de Velden

To Socialist Alliance Affiliates (through Socialist Alliance National Executive and Affiliate representatives)

Comrades,

We write to request that each Affiliate of the Socialist Alliance publish the Open Letter from non-aligned members (see below) in their respective newspapers.

We make this request fully recognising that the letter may not reflect the current positions of Affiliate organisations and memberships on the question of progressing to a single, multi-tendency socialist party. Nevertheless, we hope that all Affiliates accept that there is a collective interest in having an open and transparent discussion on directions for the socialist movement in

this most critical juncture. To date the discussion has been overwhelmingly centered on formal exchanges between individual Affiliates, as well as with organisations outside the Alliance. This debate should also include the readership of all Affiliate newspapers, which not only consists of non-aligned members of Socialist Alliance but also a wider socialist and progressive working class milieu. All would welcome a positive climate of dialogue and the opportunities for input and exchange of perspectives such access will engender. Our movement will be stronger from a more public process of clarification on the best road ahead.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to hearing from you in the near future. ■

List of signatories for Open Letter (“Developing the common socialist voice”) at April 21

[Names in italics are those added to the list since the publishing of Discussion Bulletin Volume 3, Number 3.]

Adelaide branch: David Lockwood, David Scrimgeour

Bankstown branch: Raul Bassi, Jepke Goudsmit, Graham Jones, Ben Gock, Bernie Rosen

Brisbane branch: Dave Riley, David Lafferty, Fay Waddington, Mark Cronin

Canberra branch: Alistair Greig, Lesley Hayes, Paul Kringas, Ian Shepherd, Humphrey McQueen, Bill Tully, Mick de Lange, Narendra Mohan Kommalpati, Rob Hurle, Clare Martin, Ben Smith, Jyoti Ida-Dury, Sami Omar, Lionel Bopage, Sue McKay, Anne Barrington, John van der Velden

Darwin: Ray Hayes

East Sydney branch: Kerry Klinner, Maureen Frances, Noel Hazzard

Illawarra: Len Pickering, Maureen Pickering, Joanne King, Sophie Williams, Dane Warren

Launceston branch: Alan Hasdell, Barry Hicks, Vicki Walker, Sally Wiltshire

Lismore branch: Andrew Watson; Lyn Stewart, Perry Libeau

Marrickville branch: Mitch Bond, John Reynolds

Melbourne North East: Lalitha Chelliah

Melbourne Western Suburbs: Craig Johnston

Parramatta branch: Katrina Heckendorf, Alistair Dickenson, Allison Maxwell

Perth branch: Kiraz Janicke, Chris Cain, Edith Leonard, Archie Leonard, Roger Raven

Seat of Melbourne branch: Alejandro Rodriguez

Sydney Central branch: Melinda Smith, Jamal Darwand, Rex McLeod, Adrian Wright, Al Westwood, Austin Witton, Patricia Saddler, Darcy Byrne

Sydney Northside branch: Juanita Feldbauer, Michael Morphett, Graham Moore

Toowoomba (at large): Alan Bradley

Wills branch: Maureen Murphy, Simon Millar

If any non-aligned comrade wishes to add their name to this letter, or has any questions about it, please get in touch with Michael Morphett at (02) 99812349 or John van der Velden at (02) 6247 8813 or jvelden@pcug.org.au. ■

DISCUSSION

Endorsement for the Open Letter ("Developing the common Socialist Voice")

By Dave Riley (Brisbane branch)

I should perhaps indicate where I am coming from. I had not been politically active for some time. Ill health, age, family responsibilities, fatigue, burn out...you know all the reasons. When the Socialist Alliance started up I thought, "Yeah sure...that's a good move." But while it remained an electoral coalition I wasn't too excited about it. Electoral clinches between various competing political formations have been done before with a range of different results. I won't go through all those experiments—many of which I have been involved in—but let's say I've been there/done that.

Last year when the pace quickened in the Alliance and it became obvious that it was possible to transcend the merely electoral and that the Socialist Alliance had already made great gains in that regard—that's when I got *really* interested. I too saw the beckoning potential which was already forming inside the Alliance. I unconditionally support that dynamic. That's my core gospel and I'll shout it from any rooftop is offered me.

So without going over old ground looking for new routes, it is important to recognize that the question of the Alliance is much larger than whether the various left formations can overcome their fetish with differences. The Alliance project, in my experience, is composed of three main streams:

1. Unity of the left formations.

Initially the founding groups worked together primarily on an electoral project. But they also managed to work together—within the same organisation—on many other campaigns as well. That's an especial achievement that the Socialist Alliance has been able to register. It has opened up an exciting dynamic based primarily (one would hope) on open and unconditional dialogue between affiliates.

2. Re-engage the non-aligned left.

This is a significant sector of the Alliance. It is composed of ex-members of the various founding groups (such as I) and activists who have been involved in many campaigns over the years but who did not at any stage join any of the affiliates. Many of this latter sector of Socialist Alliance membership are long time trade union militants.

3. Recruit to the socialist project.

This is an indication of the appeal the Socialist Alliance package fosters in people who are only just now becoming politically active. People join the Socialist Alliance because it carries no programmatic baggage that encourages hesitations about what being socialist means or which brand you should subscribe to. It is easy to join and get active in as it has a strong campaigning focus especially as it consolidates organisationally.

I am loyal to these three pillars of the project and am enthralled that, in such a short space of time, there has been such a large achievement in regard to them. That's something I unconditionally defend.

The statement "Building the Alliance", absolutely touches on my main concerns. Here in Brisbane the failure of some of the affiliates to actively commit to the Alliance has led to a situation of chronic stonewalling on their part. Our work is being gravely handicapped as a consequence as we are forever being told, as they sit on their hands, blocking initiatives, to wait while they finish "whistling Dixie". I think this is extremely dishonest and in terms of frustration relative to the immediate prospects for the Alliance—let alone its long term potential—I find this attitude intolerable. ■

Letter regarding amalgamation of socialist parties

By Bernie Rosen

Dear comrades

I am of the opinion that the time has arrived for the amalgamation of the socialist parties. As we agree on fundamental principles, points of detail can be resolved in the course of present and future activity. Differences

of opinion concerning Cuba as a case in point, should not deter amalgamation.

The raison d'être of our socialist commitment is to make Australia a better country to live in, by eliminating injustice, poverty, exploitation and racism. ■

Further Discussion on Israel-Palestine

By Bernie Rosen (Cantebury-Bankstown branch)

Janet Burstall from Workers Liberty has written a very interesting article under the heading "Israel/Palestine discussion".

In a short article not all aspects of a problem can be presented. For example, an exposition of the philosophy of Zionism and the incontestable fact that the

Palestinians were not in any way responsible for the holocaust.

Exiled from their own country since the massacre of Deir Yassin in April 1948, when 254 Palestinians were slaughtered is a major cause of the conflict that started shortly after the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

Britain was then the leading imperialist power, and promised the Zionists that they would sponsor in Palestine that had a population of 600,000 Arabs and 50,000 Jews a Jewish nationalist home. The League of Nations gave Britain a mandate over Palestine.

The President of the Zionist movement was Dr Chaim Weizmann who was invited with other Zionist and Jewish leaders to attend and speak at the Versailles peace conference.

A French Jewish academic Professor Sylvan Levi in the second part of his address stated "Palestine was a small and poor land, that it already had a population of six hundred thousand Arabs, that the Jews had a higher standard of life than the Arabs and would tend to dispossess them".

Chaim Weizmann spoke after Levi. He said "I defined the Jewish National Home to mean the creation of an administration which would arise out of the natural conditions of the country always safeguarding the interests of non-Jews with the hope that by Jewish immigration Palestine would ultimately become as Jewish as England is English."

The sweetener about safeguarding the interests of non-Jews was inadvertently refuted by Weizmann on the next page of his autobiography, *Trial and Error*. I quote from page 306: "As we came out of the Conference precincts Levi came up to me and held out his hand. Instinctively I withdrew my own and said 'You have sought to betray us'."

This brief encounter depicts in embryo the political outlook and intentions of the Zionist movement. There was intermittent Arab rioting from 1919 until Britain relinquished its mandate in 1948.

Since then the Zionists have switched their allegiance to the USA whose prime interest in the Middle East is the acquisition of oil and the pursuit of politics that is consonant with the avarice of their billionaire ruling class.

Janet Burstall's remedy of a two state solution is a pragmatic one that has merit in the short term. The political folly of the Zionists in inducing a million Russian Jews to settle in Israel while over three million Palestinians are languishing in displaced persons camps has considerably increased their anger and frustration and intensified the conflict. Recently the Zionists offered impoverished Argentinean Jews the opportunity to settle in Israel. Then they claim that they want peace, and blame the Arabs for the *intifada*.

Any reasonable solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict must guarantee the Palestinians right to return to Israel with adequate compensation for the property and possessions that they abandoned after the massacre of Deir Yassin in 1948.

If the Zionists can claim the right for Jewish people to return to Israel after an absence of 2000 years, it logically follows that the Palestinians have the same right after 55 years.

Janet Burstall's idea of a two-state solution has merit for Palestinians who prefer to live in their own state, but it is only part of a long historical process.

I envisage in the future small states like Israel, Jordan and Palestine forming a federation following disenchantment with bourgeois nationalism.

At this point of time it is hard to predict when this will happen. What can be said with some accuracy is that when they accept a Marxist, that is a working class conception of the state as defined by Lenin, federation will follow.

Jewish people should be encouraged to realise that they can eliminate the evil of anti-semitism by joining in the struggle to proscribe all forms of racism in the countries where they reside.

The Zionist concept of a safe haven for Jewish people in Israel has not eventuated. The period since the 1917 Balfour Declaration has shown that Jewish migrants to Israel cannot solve their problems at the expense of the Palestinian people. ■

Initial assessment of Socialist Alliance's NSW election campaign

By Lisa Macdonald

[This is a personal assessment, not necessarily the views of all members of the NSW State Campaign Committee.]

Despite Labor Premier Bob Carr managing to get through the whole state election campaign without commenting to the war on Iraq, except to endorse the Liberal opposition leader's last-minute call on NSW voters not to let the war issue determine their vote on March 22, the public "No war" position of the Green, Democrat, Socialist Alliance, Reform the Legal System, and some Unity and ALP candidates transformed March 22 into an "unofficial" poll on the war.

The election results reflected the widespread opposition to the war, with a general shift to the left, in particular to the Greens.

Labor, widely seen as being anti-war despite Carr's abstinence on the question, was re-elected with a four

percent increase in its vote. The Greens, most clearly seen as the anti-war party, doubled its vote. The Coalition, the explicitly pro-war party federally which, in NSW, campaigned almost exclusively on the "law and order" issue, lost vote share and seats.

Results

Socialist Alliance lower house results

Marrickville: 2.92 percent (with donkey)
Illawarra: 0.45 percent
Charlestown: 0.65 percent
Lismore: 0.68 percent
Bankstown: 2.7 percent (with donkey)
Auburn: 0.44 percent
Port Jackson: 1.3 percent
Total lower house primary votes: 3100

Socialist Alliance upper house results

5020 primary votes (about 0.2 percent)

This compares with other small parties:

No Privatisation People's Party: 4460

Peter Breen's Reform the Legal System: 6150

Save Our Suburbs: 13,555

The Greens

In the upper house, Ian Cohen was re-elected and Sylvia Hale was elected. They now join Lee Rhiannon, who was not up for re-election this time, in the Legislative Council.

In the lower house, the Greens averaged 8 percent across the state (8.4 percent in Sydney metropolitan, 8.6 percent in regional cities, around 6.5 percent in rural areas). This was, on average, a doubling of their 1999 NSW result and an increase of 3.4 percent on their average in the last federal election.

The Greens pushed the Liberals to third position in three Labor seats: Port Jackson, Marrickville and Kiera.

The best Green results were in areas with a high proportion of well educated/professional "middle class":

Port Jackson 29 percent (inner Sydney)

Marrickville 28 percent (inner Sydney)

Kiera 19 percent (Wollongong area, contained by the federal electorate of Cunningham which the Greens won late last year)

Blue Mountains 17 percent

Vaucluse 17 percent (Sydney north shore)

North Shore (Sydney) 15 percent

Lismore 15 percent

Newcastle 15 percent

Bligh 13 percent (inner Sydney)

But the Greens also did proportionally better in working-class migrant areas where there was strong opposition to the war (eg: in Auburn, where the Greens tripled their vote from last state election, from 2.7 percent to 8.1 percent), based on their national profile as the anti-war party.

The big increase in the Greens' vote was the result of at least three factors:

- Their national media profile and public presence as *the* anti-war party, especially in the last month of the election campaign (Bob Brown was on the TV news almost every day commenting against the war and the Greens had a very high anti-war profile at all the mass rallies and via posters on the streets)
- Combined with their recent electoral successes (all in NSW) and consequently their increased mass credibility as a viable electoral alternative (ie: they won a NSW Senate seat in 2001, the federal Cunningham by-election in 2002)
- The attendant increase in their resources (eg: the NSW Greens pumped an extra \$20,000 into Col Hesse's campaign in Marrickville, on top of what was raised by the local branch).

The Progressive Labour Party

The PLP appeared as independents on the ballot (they are currently campaigning to obtain electoral registration), so their vote reflects their significant support base in the Newcastle area:

Newcastle (Harry Williams) 3.6 percent

Charlestown (Kate Ferguson) 3.4 percent

Wallsend (Di Gibson) 3.8 percent

Other

The Democrats were pretty much wiped out, standing in only about 50 percent of lower house seats and averaging just one percent of the lower house vote.

Peter Breen's Reform the Legal System averaged less than one percent.

The No Privatisation People's Party did not contest lower house seats and scored less than Socialist Alliance in the upper house.

The informal vote averaged 2.3 percent across the state, and was highest in Bankstown at 5.7 percent (this electorate has a high non-English speaking background population).

Socialist Alliance's vote

Getting NSW electoral registration and having our name of the ballot paper was a step forward, both in terms of raising the "red flag" and Socialist Alliance profile, and also in increasing our vote. Compared to the 2001 federal election, when Socialist Alliance did not have its name on the ballot, we improved our average vote in the lower house seats (in 2001 we averaged 1 percent nationwide), and our 2003 NSW upper house vote was almost double our 2001 NSW Senate vote.

In all of those seats where the Socialist Alliance received a lower vote than in the last election, the Greens *more than* doubled their vote (ie: did better than the average Green increase). I think this was the main factor in a reduced Socialist Alliance vote.

In Bankstown, where Socialist Alliance scored its second highest vote in NSW, the Greens campaign was very weak and their vote was less than average (6.2 percent). But in Marrickville and Port Jackson, the socialist vote held pretty steady despite a big increase in the Green vote.

Given the "Greenslide" in NSW over the last 2 years, Socialist Alliance did well to hold the electoral ground it did. The 3100 consciously socialist votes in the lower house and more than 5000 socialist votes in the upper house tells us that there's a lot more Socialist Alliance-building potential in NSW than we are tapping at the moment.

Polling day

While Socialist Alliance did not benefit directly from the anti-war vote, we benefited enormously from the campaign and polling day in terms of profile, networking and consolidation of the Alliance's support base.

On election day, 282 people handed out for Socialist Alliance - about 30 percent more than in NSW in the federal election. This reflects that Socialist Alliance branches are influencing and organising more people now in NSW.

On the polling booths we covered, we were without question seen as *the* anti-war campaigners. Socialist Alliance distributed around 35,000 anti-war march leaflets, agitated for people to write "No war" on their ballots, sold dozens of anti-war badges and stickers, and collected pages of signatures on the petition calling for the blocking of supply. We have not yet chased up Green and ALP scrutineers about the level of response to the

call for voters to write “No war” on their ballot papers, but our spruiking about it at polling booths was more often than not well received.

The Greens, in contrast, largely limiting themselves to the “Vote Green” message in canvassing. They ran dead on the “No war” on the ballot paper campaign, and generally didn’t hand out movement propaganda (Greens canvassers on two booths refused to do so because it would be “confusing” to voters, and one Greens canvasser we spoke to actually supported the war).

In quite a few booths, relentless pressure from Socialist Alliance members’ campaigning forced, after a few hours, both Greens and ALP supporters to also distribute anti-war rally leaflets.

The ALP worked pretty hard in most areas to present an anti-war face and stem the drift to the Greens, especially in Labor “left” areas such as inner Sydney (putting up Labor against the war posters around polling booths, wearing purple ribbons, etc), but in other areas (more Anglo, working-class areas) Labor canvassers berated Socialist Alliance campaigners as “traitors” for opposing the war.

Comrades reported many instances of Greens activists complementing Socialist Alliance on its consistent anti-war and pro-refugee work. A few Greens confided that they voted for us, including one Greens booth organiser, because “you are the serious activists”; one Bankstown Greens member handed out Socialist Alliance how-to-votes when hers ran out because “we want the same thing really”; and some Greens openly discussed with comrades possibilities for “red-green” tickets in the September council elections and more joint work. It seems that there’s some real room among the Greens base for us to increase the pressure on their leadership to collaborate with Socialist Alliance, and to win left Greens to Socialist Alliance if/when those calls fall on deaf ears.

The Greens seem to have covered most booths in Sydney and regional centres, but were thin on the ground in some outer suburban areas. However, they certainly had more people on the ground in general than the ALP, which was very stretched in many areas. At one booth an ALP canvasser admitted she was not even a Labor supporter but had been “organised” to hand out for the ALP through her workplace - the Premier’s Department.

The Democrats were barely visible on the day and, in quite a few booths, despite the party’s formal anti-war position and their policy of split preferencing (preference recommendations were made for both ALP and Coalition on their how-to-votes), were openly handing out Liberal HTVs along with their own. At least some of the canvassers for Reform the Legal System said they were being paid for handing out on the day.

Our bold, active anti-war stance on the day will have seeded a lot of curiosity about Socialist Alliance and won us more respect among activist-minded people - gains that will stay with us well beyond the election and can, with a conscious approach to recruiting and building the Socialist Alliance branches, be converted into a stronger and larger activist organisation.

The campaign

What we did well/what worked

(i) Focusing our work around anti-war campaigning was essential. We come out of the election campaign with a much stronger profile and authority as leaders of the anti-war movement on the ground.

This was the result of:

- Socialist Alliance’s visible presence at the central anti-war rallies with big, showy (or numerous smaller) Socialist Alliance stalls and lots of placards. [I now think we made a mistake when we decided a year ago not to get a lot of professionally printed plastic placards – we desperately need an “answer” to the Greens “triangle”.]
- Socialist Alliance members’ key role in establishing or building local anti-war committees (Leichhardt, Western Suburbs, Marrickville, Manly, Northside, Newtown, Chippendale).
- Socialist Alliance initiating local anti-war marches, public meetings and peace picnics (all branches in NSW organised at least one such activity, wherever possible along with a local peace group/Greens/community organisations).
- The pervasiveness of Socialist Alliance anti-war merchandise (this sounds like a minor factor, however the almost 1000 Socialist Alliance anti-war T-shirts that Sydney Central branch has now sold are seen everywhere at rallies, in the streets, etc and make us seem *much* bigger than we are).

(ii) The ongoing bi-weekly shopping centre/train station campaigning stalls (using megaphones, sandwich boards, etc), and getting an extensive Socialist Alliance info stall to every public meeting/activity organised by others that we possibly could was the backbone of our profile and indispensable to reaching activists/potential activists.

(iii) We did not do enough mass media work, and when we did (around the Villawood revolt, new NSW anti-terror laws, writing “No War” on ballots, etc), the Greens, as the “credible” electoral alternative, squeezed us out entirely. However, where branches put some time into local/suburban media, we found it fairly easy to get good (and regular) coverage. Media releases based on Socialist Alliance “statements” on big current issues didn’t often get in, but letters to the editor and coverage of our local anti-war actions always did. This should continue post-election.

(iv) Where we put resources into getting coverage in other language media (eg: in Auburn), we got a good response/coverage (eg: we were profiled in all four Turkish newspapers). We should do this much more systematically, and across many more migrant communities, in between elections.

(v) Where we managed to push ourselves onto other organisations’ “Meet the candidates” forum platforms, we almost always got the best response from the audience. We usually had to fight to be included with the “major parties” (the Greens, perceiving us as either irrelevant or a liability electorally, rarely collaborated with Socialist Alliance in this regard), but it is worthwhile getting along to these.

(vi) While we cannot be scientific about this until we examine our vote booth by booth, it does appear that

letterboxing makes a noticeable difference to our vote (and obviously to our profile). In those electorates where considerable letterboxing was done, we seem to have received a better vote, and certainly comrades report people arriving at polling booths asking for Socialist Alliance on the basis of having received the broadsheet in their letterbox.

(vii) The “forced march” on contacting all members and supporters to help with the campaign, especially on polling day, underlined the need for Socialist Alliance branches to keep in much more regular/closer contact by phone with supporters and members. The response was extremely positive, even from people we haven’t communicated with properly since they joined in the last year, and we joined more than 20 new members in the last week of campaigning, including from amongst those people who agreed to help us on polling day.

What we need to improve/what didn’t work

(i) While focusing almost all our election campaigning energies into the anti-war movement, we did not differentiate ourselves sufficiently from the Greens in our election propaganda/slogans. This left us in the situation of being seen too much as the electoral “junior cousin” to the Greens, instead of the radical/activist voice of the movement.

We should have made more use of the “Money for jobs/services/etc *not* war” angle, the “No war for oil” anti-imperialist angle, and the “Stop work to stop the war” campaign (given the ALP right’s grip on the union bureaucracy in NSW, this latter demand was always going to be limited to a propaganda campaign, but it had a real resonance among workers that we didn’t use electorally).

(ii) We didn’t project our lower house candidates as *the* uncompromising anti-war candidates quickly or strongly enough in local leaflets and posters.

(iii) Beyond two statewide mail-outs, we did not organise/involve Socialist Alliance members living in non-branch areas. This was a huge missed opportunity in the current highly politicised social context – the result of too few resources in the State Campaign Committee – but has to be corrected. If the work done by Ron Bailey in Wingham is any indication (letterboxing, getting local media for Socialist Alliance, organising 4 or 5 other local residents to canvass for Socialist Alliance on polling day), I’m sure that many more people in rural areas would have helped out in the campaign in various ways had we phoned and helped them get organised.

(iv) Despite initial plans to hold Socialist Alliance meetings targeted at particular migrant communities (our candidates spoke at least six languages between them), these didn’t come off, again due to resource and time limitations. Had we been able to do this, the very positive response we received at meetings of all candidates convened by particular migrant organisations indicates that we would have made important ground in Socialist Alliance profile and membership, and probably got a few more of the votes that went to the Greens or ALP as perceived anti-war parties.

(v) We did not systematically contact and visit better-off members and supporters to help fund the campaign. We did receive some considerable donations (self-

organised) so probably could have dug up many more had we done this properly – and saved a lot of fundraising sweat.

(vi) We didn’t make enough use of the web site, relying for too long on the national convenors’ resources. The NSW election page really only became useful in the last two weeks of the campaign.

Where to now

Getting re-registered with the State Electoral Office

NSW Socialist Alliance is now required to re-apply for state electoral registration by submitting a new list of at least 750 financial members by June 30. The NSW election campaign affirmed that having party registration is a crucial “bottom line” for doing effective electoral work, so getting re-registered will need to be a major campaign for NSW branches in May/June.

Local government elections

Local council elections are scheduled for early in 2004. My feeling is that we should contest these elections: to continue to build Socialist Alliance profile in general, as a means of growing and further consolidating the Socialist Alliance branches by giving them a local campaigning focus, and to benefit from and deepen the experiences gained from the Victorian branches’ successful council election campaign earlier this year.

Reaching the PLP support base

The Progressive Labour Party’s vote (without benefit of having their name on ballot paper) indicates a still substantial support base in the Newcastle area, which we need to find the ways to engage with. This underlines the importance of the proposed post-election discussions with the PLP leadership, and maintaining the anti-sectarian pressure on the PLP leaders so we can talk to their base about the importance of left unity, etc. The urgency of doing so is underlined by the fact that the PLP are likely to obtain NSW electoral registration this year, and possibly federal registration as well.

Continued collaboration with the Greens

The Greens in NSW have been significantly strengthened in the process of this election campaign. Their membership has tripled in NSW since the start of the campaign.

The fact that the Greens did not win a lower house seat has more to do with the NSW optional preferential voting system (both Labor and Liberal closed ranks to campaign for a “Vote 1 only”, which meant a high proportion of votes that would have flowed to the Greens second were exhausted at the major parties).

The grip of the ALP right in NSW means there is much more space for an electoral party to the left (much more so than in Victoria or WA, for example). This, combined with almost a decade of Labor in government in NSW (and the accumulated hatred for them), and the demise of the Democrats, creates considerable electoral space which the Greens are tailor-made to occupy. With each new (inevitable) attack on working people by the NSW Labor government, the Greens electoral weight will grow.

However, this also puts the Greens under growing pressure to act “responsibly”. So, they will be walking a tightrope between responding to the radicalisation in society as a result of the war and other movements as they develop, and their desire to appeal to a broader/more conservative electoral constituency. This contradiction was reflected in the Greens upper house voting recommendation, which was to vote 1 Green, 2 “Save Our Suburbs” (an anti-urban-development, anti-immigration, pro-environment activist network), 3 Socialist Alliance (the appeal to their left base).

I agree with Tom Flanagan’s comment in the *Discussion Bulletin* (Volume 3 Number 2) that: “As the

Australian political landscape continues to develop, Socialist Alliance faces two possible scenarios. We could find ourselves working alongside and in collaboration with an increasingly radical Green party. Alternatively, if the Greens fail to rise to the challenges posed by a radicalising political situation, we can potentially emerge from their electoral shadow as the radical pole of attraction in Australian politics.” For the time being, this means we need to continue to engage with the leftists within the Greens (especially at the local/grassroots membership level, and in the trade unions), and simultaneously build the strongest possible socialist organisation. ■

Building Socialist Alliance through the anti-war movement

By Graham Matthews (Batman branch) and Vanessa Hearman (Wills branch)

Melbourne branches have had a somewhat rich, though varied experience of building Socialist Alliance through the anti-war movement. In this brief contribution, we want to outline some of the successes and to circulate some of the facts of the Melbourne situation for comrades’ consideration. We believe that the Melbourne experiences that we know of are pertinent to a discussion of perspectives of the Alliance, which will be held at the May national conference.

As background it would be worthwhile noting the relative success of anti-war mobilisations in Melbourne. From the first mobilisation on October 13 to the most recent, hundreds of thousands have been mobilised in opposition to war, the most notable being at the February 14 evening rally, where according to the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union counters, some 220,000 people flooded the streets.

At a more localized level, the anti-war campaign has also mobilised significant numbers. Local rallies in the Brunswick (Wills) and Northcote (Batman) localities have each mobilised hundreds. More significantly perhaps, both the Moreland Peace Group (Brunswick/Coburg) and the Darebin Anti-War Group (DAWG) have attracted new layers of activists to organising against the war at a local level. Many of these activists (at least on the experience of DAWG) are open to socialist ideas and some have been won to join and actively participate in the Alliance.

In DAWG itself, meetings have ranged from around 11 to 25 in attendance. Of those, from seven to 10 have been Socialist Alliance members (largely from the ISO and DSP). The role that the Alliance has been seen to play in the organisation of the local anti-war campaign, the leadership given to the campaign by Socialist Alliance members and the prominence of Socialist Alliance identification, has encouraged a layer of otherwise unaffiliated DAWG activists to relate to, and ultimately collaborate with and join Socialist Alliance.

One should not overstate the success of the Alliance’s growth from its members direct involvement in the local anti-war campaign. Nevertheless some eight new Socialist Alliance members have been joined to the Batman branch over the last month, many of them coming either directly from DAWG or else from the local protests that DAWG has initiated.

A further successful tactic in attracting new members to (Batman) Socialist Alliance has been the branch’s decision to move to fortnightly meetings. Motivated by National Executive resolutions calling on Socialist Alliance branches to be at the centre of organising against the war, and a desire to build on the anti-war sentiment in the area, the branch voted in late February to move to fortnightly meetings, and at the same time to become more organised by convening an elected steering committee, which could better coordinate the administration of Alliance affairs between fortnightly meetings.

It would be wrong to draw a final balance sheet of the decision to move the Alliance to a more organised footing too soon. Nevertheless, early indications are that the decision has been fruitful. Alliance meetings, which have been in the past rather tedious, and dominated by administrative necessities have begun to take on a lighter, more political air. We have organised a well-attended discussion about the anti-Vietnam war campaign, and a public meeting about the US regime’s war plans, which attracted some 34 in attendance—about half of whom were not members of any affiliate. Two people also joined the Alliance. The other effect has been the opening of participation to more non-affiliated members of the Alliance. The fortnightly schedule gives members an easier means of accessing the Alliance. It has encouraged more activity from non-affiliated members.

However the process is still a relatively new one. The campaign to involve new layers of activists in the Socialist Alliance, to make the Alliance attractive in its own right, and to organise socialist education and activity through the Alliance till has a long way to go.

In my (Graham’s) role as state co-convenor I would also assess that the advantages of a more frequent meeting schedule and more organised structure for the Alliance are not limited to Batman branch. If we are to see the success of the Alliance in terms of attracting new forces to socialism, of attracting and organising new members, and of disseminating socialist material, then it would seem clear that greater organisation and more frequent meetings are bearing fruit.

Both the Seat of Melbourne branch and the Gellibrand branch have also moved recently to a fortnightly meeting schedule. Both have also seen

relative growth in attendance at meetings, and in their general success. Gellibrand organised a very successful council election campaign (including one result above 6 percent) for instance, from which it built a useful public meeting. Seat of Melbourne, which has only begun meeting again since late 2002, has seen its meetings also grow, with renewed interest in membership from some inner-city dwellers.

While reaffirming that the results gained so-far are very early indications, it would be wrong to dismiss them out of hand. Experience will continue to show what is the best way to build the Alliance, both in terms of membership and influence.

The one inner-city based Melbourne branch which does not meet fortnightly at this stage is Wills branch. Wills branch has taken a decision to restrict meetings to a four week cycle.

Wills has in the past been one of the most active Socialist Alliance branches. It ran some very good election campaigns, winning up to 5.5 percent in local elections in competition with the Greens. Recently however it has "gone off the boil".

Wills meetings attract in the main, members of the affiliates only and are averaging seven to eight people per meeting. In arguments against the motion to move to fortnightly meetings, it was argued that we were not at the stage of requiring fortnightly meetings, as Socialist Alliance is only an electoral grouping "of a special kind". It was argued that the Moreland Peace Group existed as a forum for anti-war activities and it was not Socialist Alliance's role to newly create another anti-war movement.

There was also the argument that people supposedly only wanted to join an ordinary political party and not a revolutionary organisation.

In an attempt to address concerns that the meetings were getting excessively administrative and were

unlikely to involve new people, an executive body which had been elected previously but only met irregularly, was reinvigorated to take on the burden of administrative work. This executive body meets monthly, around a week after the all-in meeting to act on administrative tasks.

However with monthly meetings, inevitably the branch meetings end up discussing administrative tasks, as it has been at least three weeks since any branch body (the executive) has met. There might also have been proposals made which the branch or executive has forgotten about (eg certain fundraising proposals agreed upon, which individuals have duly followed up, only for these to be put on the backburner due to other more recent developments). In the lead up to conference and the related tasks (fundraising planning, membership renewals, discussion of conference documents), it is evident the strain being felt to fit all these tasks in especially when we are on a monthly meeting schedule. For example, a pre-conference discussion around the trade union document presented by comrade Riki Lane was attended by five people and as the meeting had been going for two hours already, discussion was very brief and did not delve deeply into the document, though separate proposed amendments to the document were already planned by one member of the branch. The last meeting before Conference on April 30 needs to elect delegates, discuss the draft perspectives document and the conference itself.

We offer this critical assessment of the development of Socialist Alliance in Melbourne, not as a point scoring exercise, but as a feeder to further discussion. If Socialist Alliance is to succeed, we firmly believe it must become more inclusive and more professional. Steps forward are being made, but the going is slow. More concerted energy will be needed if Socialist Alliance is to develop into the organisation that we know it can. ■

RESOLUTIONS AND AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTIONS FOR THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Proposed amendments to the Alliance Constitution

By Workers' Liberty

These constitutional amendments are designed to:

1. Make it easier for members to participate in branches, through clearer definition of a properly constituted meetings, of due notice of meeting for electing delegates, and for chairing and minute taking to be standard practice.
2. Make it a responsibility of the national leadership of the Alliance to make sure that all viewpoints are heard and considered, to initiate and lead political discussion throughout the Alliance to clarify and resolve differences on all important matters.
3. Confirm in the constitution the current practice that caucuses, groups or affiliates within the Alliance have the right to produce and circulate literature publicly
4. Make sure it does not become harder for members to call a special national conference as the Alliance is growing, by reducing the number required to petition for a conference from 1/3 to 1/4 of the membership.

The proposed amendments are:

6.7. *If one quarter 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 regular National Conferences.*

(changing from 1/3 paid-up membership as the only way)

7.3. *The National Executive has the duty to both canvass the broadest possible consensus within the Alliance and to initiate and lead political discussion throughout the Alliance to clarify and resolve differences on all important matters.*

8.x - *A branch meeting shall be properly convened if it is held on a regular scheduled day (or days) of the month, or else notified by mail or email with at least 14 days notice to each branch member.*

8.x *Each branch meeting shall have a chair and a minutes secretary. The approved minutes shall be forwarded to the relevant State, District or City Organising Committee.*

8.x - *Where branch meetings will conduct elections for office bearers, delegates or candidate pre-selections, then 28 days notice of the meeting and the intended ballot should be given to all members.*

10.3 *Caucuses, groups or affiliates within the Alliance have the right to produce and circulate literature publicly.* ■

For an Alliance monthly newspaper

By Workers' Liberty

The Alliance needs a printed newspaper made available to members, supporters and the public which is open to all opinions in the Alliance which can:

- build working relationships and dialogue with working class and radical movements and within the Alliance;
- be a product of the efforts of the entire Alliance, unifying our efforts across cities, towns and states, and across affiliates and independents;
- provide a collective voice whilst allowing expression of diverse views.

A regular open publication can be a tangible product of our progress towards political unity, and a forum for calling all points of view to account and measure against each other.

Because a regular open publication is regular, it can develop a relationship with and aim to be a voice for working class and radical struggles.

Because a regular, open publication is regular and public, the significance of what it says has to be taken seriously by Alliance members and supporters.

Because a regular open publication is open, it will mean that all members, whether affiliated or not can be represented in it, and be passionately committed to it.

If we want the Alliance to be able to unite all the best socialists, militants and activists in Australia, then a regular open publication can play an indispensable role

in ensuring that this is a unity based on agreement, commitment and democratic methods.

A regular publication of the Alliance will enable the Alliance to have a public face, and reduce the extent to which the Democratic Socialist Party and Green Left Weekly appear to dominate the public face of the Alliance. This will succeed to the extent that the editorial development, writing and distribution is genuinely open to and actively taken up by a wide range of Alliance members and supporters.

Lenin in 1901 outlined the role of a newspaper in gathering the disparate forces of the labour movement. Although much is different today, the need to concentrate and organise class struggle politics is just as urgent.

A newspaper is what we most of all need; without it we cannot conduct the systematic all round propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle, which is the chief and permanent task of Social Democracy in general and, in particular the pressing task of the moment, when interest in politics and in questions of socialism has been aroused among the broadest strata of the population. Never has the need been felt so acutely as today for reinforcing the dispersed agitation in the form of individual action, local leaflets, pamphlets etc, by means of generalised and systematic agitation that can only be conducted with the aid of a periodical press. It may be said without exaggeration that the frequency and regularity with which a newspaper is printed (and distributed) can serve as a precise criterion of how well this cardinal and most essential sector of our militant

activities is built up...If we fail, and as long as we fail to combine our efforts to influence the people and the government by means of the printed word, it will be utopian to think of combining other means, more complex, more difficult, but also more decisive for exerting influence.

Lenin, *Where to Begin*, 1901.

On a more practical and immediate note, this is a proposal to begin with a monthly publication. Starting out monthly would give the Alliance sufficient frequency to deal with current affairs but not be so frequent as to mean that it would be too difficult to involve the range of tendencies and non-affiliates in the Alliance in an equal partnership of editorial, writing, production and distribution.

I generally support Chris Slee's case "For a Socialist Alliance newspaper" made in Discussion Bulletin Volume 2 Number 6 December 2002, however the implication of Chris's article was that an Alliance paper would replace all but theoretical publications by affiliates, and could be weekly. In the immediate future a weekly could only in reality be a rebadged Green Left Weekly. Conference should also endorse a process for increasing the frequency of the Socialist Alliance publication.

The motions being proposed for a publication and its editorial policy and control are broad in principle motions. The details would need fleshing out, and many practical issues would have to be solved by a group delegated by the conference to do so. In reality a monthly Socialist Alliance publication would probably require a

sacrifice of one in four issues of GLW, to be replaced with the Alliance publication. This is clearly a decision for the DSP to make. The other affiliates may also reconsider the production schedules of their own publications, in order to support an Alliance publication.

Resolution: That the Alliance commence production of a monthly publication as soon as the National Conveners are able to organise the resources to support it.

If this proposal is carried then the following amendments to the Constitution be made to enable it:

1. **The Editorial Board should be chosen by the Conference.**
2. **The editors have a responsibility within the Alliance to both develop an editorial line which represents genuine consensus, and to seek contributions from various points of view that will enable differences to be clarified and understood.**
3. **The editorial policy should be a balance between:**
 - **reporting news of current campaigns and struggles around Australia**
 - **letters, and readers' points of view**
 - **political discussion.**
4. **The publication is open to all points of view within the Alliance, in coverage of news stories and in debate.**
5. **The frequency of the publication can be increased by a vote of the National Executive, on a unanimous recommendation from the Editorial Board, or else by a National Conference. ■**

Proposed amendments to the foreign policy section of the Socialist Alliance platform

By Riki Lane, Workers' Liberty

Under "Against Australia's imperialist foreign policy"

1. Rename it "**Solidarity with working class and democratic struggles in all countries**" then amend/add dot points as follows

2. Amend first dot point to read:

- **Opposition to Australia's imperialist foreign policy, and the (continue with "export of military hardware, personnel and training")**

3. Insert second dot point

- **Close Pine Gap, no to the Star Wars/missile defence shield project**

4. Insert third dot point

- **Solidarity with struggles against repressive regimes and reactionary forces including political Islam.**

5. Insert final dot point

- **For the right of nations to self-determination, including in the Middle East the Palestinians, the Israeli Jews and the Kurds, as well as around the world**

Note: The existing Socialist Alliance policy in this section of the platform reads

"Against Australia's imperialist foreign policy

- Stop Australia's export of military hardware, personnel and training

- Solidarity with Indonesia's peoples, not its military and police
- End ANZUS
- For a nuclear-free Pacific
- No to APEC

These amendments are made particularly relevant by the war on Iraq, and address political issues which have arisen during that war. We need to present a positive response based on solidarity with actual struggles for democratic and working class rights, so as to be able to build and educate solidarity campaigns that will endure and not be disoriented or demobilised by changes in the course of wars and struggles.

This includes acknowledgement of national rights for both Palestinians and Israelis as part of a positive response that acknowledges all democratic rights, and struggles against dictatorial regimes (or potential dictators), regardless of the attitude of US or any other imperialism to those regimes.

The Alliance should support peoples' democratic rights, regardless of their leaders'/rulers' attitudes to/relationship with US imperialism. There have been arguments that the Iraqi Kurds should not have the right to independence, on the grounds that they are pro-US.

This is not an independent socialist frame of thought, but one that ties us to imperialism by making us put a minus wherever the USA puts a plus, a very poor and inconsistent basis for mobilising working class solidarity and achieving human liberation.

This proposed amendment is a small start to ensuring that the Socialist Alliance's position on these issues is clear and consistently democratic and for working class unity. ■

Brief comments on the paper 'Rebuilding democratic, militant unionism—Socialist Alliance and the Trade Unions'

By Alison Thorne (Wills branch)

Congratulations to Riki Lane for drafting the National conveners trade union document for the Socialist Alliance National Conference. The document is a very useful contribution which will inform our trade union work in the upcoming period.

All affiliates, as well as non-aligned members, have agreed for some time that the formation of active and democratic Socialist Alliance caucuses within unions is a way we can work together to have a significant impact within the union movement and win new support for socialist ideas.

We are starting to see this happen already in several unions. My own union, the Community and Public Sector Union, is a good example. Socialist Alliance members have worked together effectively within Centrelink and, through Members First, we are now running a team to challenge the incumbents in the upcoming CPSU elections.

I appreciate many things about the draft document but particularly agree with its clear orientation to go beyond propaganda to having a real impact and providing leadership to our fellow unionists as proud and visible socialists within the union movement.

While agreeing with the general thrust of the document, I have four amendments to move.

The first section titled "The union movement today", correctly identifies the impact of the Accord years on the union movement and points to the beginnings of a revival in some parts of the union movement. The document talks about the CFMEU, Workers First in the AMWU and the impact of the inspiring leadership provided by Michelle O'Neil's team in the TCFUA. However, by focusing on these positive examples, the document does not address developments in white collar unions.

I propose adding the following words immediately after the section about Workers First and before the section about the TCFUA.

Amendment number 1: "Some of the densest concentrations of unionism can now be found in female dominated industries such as health and education which have immense potential."

The section "What Socialist Alliance needs to do in unions" provides an excellent guide to members.

The other three amendments I am moving are small but important additions to this section.

Amendment number 2: To the dot point "Be active on the day-to-day issues of wages and conditions" I would propose adding the words "***and provide serious leadership.***"

If agreed to, the reworded dot point would read "***Be active and provide serious leadership on the day-to-day issues of wages and working conditions.***" Although this idea was probably implied in the original, it needs to be made explicit. Socialist Alliance has the potential to be a pole of attraction to counter the middle caste, which is more interested in "settling" a dispute than winning it. We can do this by seriously fighting for industrial strategies which can win.

Amendment number 3: "Integrate struggles over the special needs of women workers and people of colour" must be expanded to explicitly address the demands of lesbian, gay, bi and transgendered workers. Many Socialist Alliance members in unions are already taking up the fight against homophobia and pushing to expand many conditions available to heterosexual couple to their queer co-workers."

This dot point should be reworded to read: "***Integrate struggles over the special needs of women workers, lesbian, gay, bi and transgendered workers and people of colour.***"

Amendment number 4: The final amendment is to be explicit in our support for organising amongst casualised workers. The dot point about organising the unorganised to be reworded to read "***Be in the forefront of campaigns to organise and unionise unorganised workers, especially young workers and casual workers.***"

The trade union movement is changing. Socialist Alliance needs to be a part of spearheading this change so that the movement organises and takes up the fight for the demands of the working class in its rainbow diversity.

I support the thrust of the document proposed by the national conveners, commend these four amendments and look forward to the formation of vibrant Socialist Alliance caucuses in many more unions. ■

Draft resolutions to give effect to “Putting socialism on the Australian political map”

By Dick Nichols (National Co-convenor)

The following resolutions will be discussed at the April 24 and May 2 meetings of the National Executive.

Any agreed changes as a result of these discussions will be indicated in a future Discussion Bulletin.

Draft resolution on relations with the Greens

This second National Conference of the Socialist Alliance:

6. Welcomes the rise in the vote for the Greens both federally and in state and territory elections as a reflection of the growing mass rejection of the policies of economic rationalism and war;
7. Congratulates the Green parliamentarians on their opposition to the criminal war on Iraq and their role in the mass movement against this war;
8. Calls on all Socialist Alliance organizations to pursue close collaboration with Green organizations in community, social and environment campaigns;

9. Affirms that Alliance organizations will always be prepared to negotiate joint election campaigns with local Green organizations where there is agreement on the key issues of the election and that the Alliance is prepared to withdraw its own candidates in those specific cases where withdrawal would further the cause of left and progressive unity;

10. Affirms the need for ongoing serious discussion between the Greens and the Alliance on how to advance towards a society based on the principles of grass-roots democracy, environmental sustainability, social justice and peace. ■

Draft resolution on Socialist Alliance finances

This Second National Conference of Socialist Alliance:

Notes that, although the Alliance has concluded the period from its Founding Conference free of debt (see report of National Treasurer), the projections contained in the various resolutions adopted at this conference will require the Alliance to have a much higher level of income in the coming years;

Conference therefore resolves:

1. To establish a voluntary national pledge/subscription system;
2. To base the system on automatic deductions; and
3. To empower the incoming National Treasurer to draft a letter to all members asking them to participate in the system and providing all the necessary information on its workings. ■

Draft resolution on socialist education

Conference resolves:

In the light of the successful speaking tour of comrade Humphrey McQueen,

1. To expand its policy of speaking tours, with a view to covering all states and territories and rural and regional Australia;

2. To host a “Marxist Summer School” when conditions allow; and
3. To empower the incoming National Executive to develop plans in both these areas of work. ■

Draft resolution on Socialist Alliance stalls

Conference resolves:

In the light of ongoing differences among affiliates on the issue of Socialist Alliance stalls;

1. That all Socialist Alliance stalls shall be clearly demarcated by the use of Socialist Alliance placards, profile posters, flags and other any other relevant paraphernalia;

2. That Socialist Alliance stalls can and should carry the literature of all affiliates;
3. That where the literature of affiliates is carried on a Socialist Alliance stall, the Alliance’s own material and the material of affiliates should be clearly demarcated; and
4. That all affiliates are urged to carry Socialist Alliance material on their own stalls. ■

Draft resolution on aiding Alliance growth and recruitment

Conference resolves:

1. To instruct the incoming National Executive to begin a program of discussions with interested and potentially sympathetic migrant and community organizations with a view to convincing them to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance;
2. To establish the position of Socialist Alliance regional organiser. The job of regional organiser will be to help consolidate the Alliance’s presence in those regions where it at present only has contact persons and

members at large and in those regions/suburban areas where the Alliance does not have a branch, with a view to expanding the network of Alliance branches;

3. To fund the position of regional organiser from the Socialist Alliance national account with financial support from regional and state organisations where possible; and

To empower the incoming National Executive to oversee the development of a spread of regional organisers in consultation with state and regional Alliance organisations. ■

Draft resolution on developing a united Socialist Alliance intervention in the movements

Conference resolves:

1. That the Alliance strives wherever possible to intervene in a united way in the various movements (anti-war, refugee rights, women's liberation, environment, gay, lesbian and transsexual rights, aboriginal rights, Asia-Pacific and Latin American solidarity);
2. To set up national working groups in these areas. All members are eligible to join these groups which shall communicate via moderated email group;

Draft resolution on membership system

Conference resolves to adopt the following membership system:

1. Members must belong to one of the four categories (high-waged, low-waged, un-waged and secondary student);
2. Membership dues for financial year 2003-2004 shall be high-waged \$60, low-waged \$24, unwaged \$12 and secondary student \$6;
3. Members must pay their membership dues for the full year in advance;
4. One quarter of all membership dues paid to branches shall be paid to the Socialist Alliance national office;
5. Regions and states/territories may make arrangements with branches in their area to pay a percentage of membership dues to sustain regional and state/territorial Alliance operations;

Draft resolution on policy development

Conference resolves:

1. To push along the process of Alliance policy development by forming policy working groups in the following areas:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
 - Agriculture and the countryside
 - Democratic rights and civil liberties
 - Economy and full employment
 - Education
 - Environment
 - Housing
 - Health
 - Immigration, refugee and migrant rights
 - Industrial relations and union rights
 - International relations

Resolution on publication on socialism

In light of the urgent need for the Alliance to produce its own lively and compelling case for socialism, conference resolves:

1. To establish a writing group, initially composed of comrades Humphrey McQueen, Dick Nichols and [other names] to produce a draft text;

Draft resolution on relations with left organisations presently outside the Alliance

This second National Conference of the Socialist Alliance:

Noting that a number of left and socialist organisations still remain outside the Alliance;

3. That the moderator(s) of the email groups shall be the comrades nominated by the various workshops on these movements held at this conference (or, where no workshop is held, by the incoming National Executive); and
4. To urge state and regional Alliance organizations to adopt a parallel approach to that outlined here. ■

6. All branches shall keep membership records which as a minimum record the name, surname, membership category, address, phone number and email address of each member, as well as the date on which they paid their membership dues (became financial);
7. Branches will advise all members two months in advance of the date on which they are due to renew their financial membership;
8. Branches shall report changes in membership numbers (new members, renewals, transfers in and out) to the Socialist Alliance national office every quarter, using the report form provided by the national office;
9. On the basis of the information contained in the report form the Socialist Alliance national office will bill branches quarterly for the 25 per cent of membership dues owed to the national office. ■

- Lesbian, gay and transsexual rights
- Military and defence
- Social justice and welfare
- Women's rights
- Young people's rights

2. To conduct Alliance policy working groups as moderated egroups open to any interested Alliance member;
3. To call for volunteers to act as moderators for the various working groups, with the incoming National Executive to nominate moderators for each group as soon as possible; and
4. To ask these working groups to produce draft statements of policy in accordance with a schedule to be established by the incoming National Executive. ■

2. To urge all members to forward their suggestions and concerns to the group; and
3. To empower the incoming National Executive to adopt the final version of the text and oversee its publication. ■

1. Resolves to renew our invitation to all such organisations to join the Alliance;
2. Reaffirms that the Alliance is prepared to seriously negotiate a collaborative relationship with any left

organisation which has differences with specific aspects of the Alliance platform; and

Draft resolution on publications

Conference resolves:

1. That the Socialist Alliance will seek to produce its broadsheet regularly every three months;
2. That the Socialist Alliance will produce a monthly newsletter, to be called *Stand Up!* ,to be edited by the National Conveners and produced by comrade Ian Bolas;
3. That the Socialist Alliance should move to produce its own regular magazine aimed at:
 - Propagating the Alliance’s analysis of contemporary politics and its own policy alternatives;
 - Providing analysis of trends in the trade unions and various social and environmental movements;

3. Instructs the incoming National Executive to arrange meetings with all left organisations as are prepared to engage in dialogue with the Alliance. ■

- Stimulating and housing debates in the broadly anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal camp (Greens, left ALP, various movements); and

- Reflecting debate within the Alliance itself.

4. That the incoming National Executive, in the light of discussion at this conference and any further suggestions received from Alliance members and affiliates, produce a draft plan for the publication covering format, frequency, editorial board, name, funding and any other relevant issues. ■

CIRCULAR FROM THE NATIONAL CONVENERS

Making sure members are aware of pre-conference discussion

Wednesday, 16 April 2003

To: all branch, regional and state organisations

Dear comrades,

The purpose of this letter is to stress with all branch conveners and/or executives that they have a special responsibility in the period running up to our Second National Conference to ensure that all members are made fully aware of the pre-conference discussion, and of the various proposals that are being put before the Alliance membership about the way forward.

It has become clear to the National Conveners over the past weeks that many Alliance members, even a majority, are not in the least aware of this developing discussion, even though it being fully carried in the Alliance Discussion Bulletin.

The Bulletin is sent to all branches either in Word or PDF format, is carried on the web and also sent in hard copies to those branches which request it in this format.

Despite this effort to get the Bulletin distributed to all members in one form or another it is becoming increasingly clear that many members know very little about it.

Given this state of affairs the National Conveners urge all branch executives to seriously review their

methods of communication with their members, and to check that all members at least know that our Second National Conference is upon us in less than a month, that decisions crucial for the future of the Alliance will be taken at it and that the debate is under way in the Bulletin.

Specifically we urge all branch executives to check and confirm that they have set up a specific method of communication of the Discussion Bulletin with each and every financial Alliance member, whether this be by the email, the web or printed copy.

(The specific web address for the bulletins is <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/idbpage.shtml>.)

Only in this way can we be certain that the Alliance as a whole is making full use of its invaluable human resources to make the best possible decisions about its future.

Yours in solidarity,

Riki Lane

David Glanz

Dick Nichols

National Conveners ■