

**DISCUSSION
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DOCUMENTS AND REPRINTS

DSP letter to the Socialist Alliance National Executive

18 February 2003

Dear comrades,

I am writing on behalf of the Political Committee of the Democratic Socialist Party to set down the perspectives of our party towards Socialist Alliance in the period leading up to the May 10-11 National Conference of the Alliance. I originally reported on this issue to the January 31 telephone hook-up of the National Executive. This letter summarises that report.

As you know, our 20th National Congress recently carried a resolution on DSP perspectives towards the Alliance, which has been circulated to all National Executive members. The Congress reaffirmed the party's analysis—that there is sufficient agreement among the affiliates to carry Socialist Alliance along the road to eventually becoming a united party of socialism in Australia (with full tendency rights, of course). It also stressed that the Alliance is operating way below potential because it suffers from a severe lack of resources.

As you know, the contribution the DSP originally proposed to make to helping ease this bottleneck was that it stop building itself as a public organization and switch the resources engaged in that work to the job of building the Alliance. However, this proposal was vetoed by the International Socialist Organisation and the DSP withdrew it.

It also became clearer as a result of the debate on the DSP's proposal that different Socialist Alliance affiliates hold contrasting conceptions of what the Alliance is and should be. We in the DSP acknowledge and respect positions of other affiliates—even as we disagree with some of them and want to continue that aspect of the Alliance debate.

Clearly for the debate to evolve we all need to implement the practical work of the Alliance—experiencing together the impact of that work, making a reading of that experience and continuing our discussion of how to implement Alliance work better.

This process will continue. However the problem of Alliance underperformance for lack of resources still remains. Indeed it has intensified because the projections adopted by the National Executive have increased the Alliance's workload. This rise in workload—in the exploding anti-war

movement, in refugee rights, in the trade unions, in the Humphrey McQueen tour and the Alliance recruitment campaign—is unavoidable, because of the natural development of the Alliance itself but also because of the increased pressure the rise of the Greens is putting upon us.

In the coming months the DSP will be developing, in collaboration with all affiliates and Alliance members, some initial proposals that we want to put forward at the Alliance's May National Conference. We hope all NE members will set down in writing their perspectives for how the Alliance should develop. Clearly however, the scope of any proposals that can realistically advanced (by the NE as a whole or by individual members of groups of members) will depend on the resources that can be marshalled to carry them out. The resource issue is serious and pressing.

The proposal to set up a working group of volunteers responsible to the National Conveners (to be discussed at the February 21 National Executive) will certainly help alleviate the problem—to the degree that volunteers actually step forward—but it will not solve it.

The DSP is more convinced than ever that a much bigger contribution to providing the Alliance with the sort of resources it needs would be provided if the DSP were free to implement its original proposal (to switch resources to Alliance-building and become an internal tendency within the Alliance).

The question we therefore ask other National Executive members to address is that of *the conditions that would allow this to happen without other affiliates threatening to leave the Alliance*. What concrete guarantees would other affiliates (and non-affiliated members) require?

The DSP invites all other Alliance National Executive members to set down their thoughts on this issue. *The DSP is open to discussing all the concerns and concrete proposals other National Executive members might have*. To take one obvious example, we would be happy to discuss establishing a temporary constitutional limit on the representation any affiliate can have on the National Executive.

The DSP wants to stress that in raising this question we in no way expect that other affiliate organizations should follow us along the path the DSP has chosen. Some may want to, others may

want to if certain conditions in Alliance functioning are met, others will continue to be opposed. That is a choice for each affiliate to make as it sees fit.

We would also stress that our proposal is *unconditional*. It does not depend on the Alliance or individual affiliates in any way adopting our view of the Alliance or any concrete proposal that we might want to raise about the functioning of the Alliance.

In the hope that we can move together towards a stronger Socialist Alliance, I again urge NE comrades to set down their thoughts on this vital issue.

Yours in solidarity

Dick Nichols

National Executive, DSP ■

DSP Congress Resolution on work in the Socialist Alliance

Adopted by the 20th Congress of the Democratic Socialist Party

This 20th Congress of the Democratic Socialist Party:

1. ***Reaffirms our commitment to strengthening the Socialist Alliance.*** Since its founding the Socialist Alliance has shown that the socialist left has been able to establish a distinct, if still modest, support base through standing in federal, state and municipal elections as a registered party. Through united work in the Alliance the left is also beginning to make a valuable contribution to the anti-war and refugee rights movements and in building solidarity with militant, democratic forces in the trade unions. Through this and other work the Alliance has already achieved a profile that overshadows that of any of the individual affiliates. The DSP is committed to further strengthening the Alliance on the basis of these gains.

2. ***Is convinced that the Socialist Alliance has the potential to develop much greater influence in the unions, the movements and in electoral politics on the basis of building higher levels of unity within the Alliance.*** The key to the success of the Alliance has been the practical demonstration that the left can work together. It is this that has inspired (and re-inspired) many leftists and progressive people to involve themselves in politics within the Alliance. It has also created interest and sympathy towards the Alliance among wider layers of unionists and movement activists. The potential clearly exists for the Alliance to further develop support within working-class and migrant communities and to continue its expansion into new regions. The more the Alliance can be developed as a united organisation of socialists (with its own publication, system of education in socialist politics and other resources) the more it will attract into its ranks these and other people committed to the struggles for social justice. This perspective is also needed to build a socialist pole of attraction

powerful enough to act on the left flank of the rapidly growing Greens. Particularly in this phase in Australian politics, restraining the Alliance's role mainly to that of a socialist electoral front would not only block the potential for socialist unity—it would undermine the Alliance's ability to harvest electoral support.

3. ***Believes that the transformation of the Alliance into a united organisation (with right of tendency for all participating forces) remains necessary and possible.*** The perspectives outlined in the document "For a Step Forward in Left Unity", adopted by the party's October 2002 National Committee plenum, retain their validity despite the sharp debate they have provoked from some on the left within and outside the Alliance. Common experience since the Alliance was founded has shown that there is a wide body of agreement among the Alliance affiliates, going beyond the proposals that make up the Alliance's Founding Platform. Indeed, the possibility of reaching a higher form of unity, along the lines achieved in the Scottish Socialist Party, has already been advocated by another Alliance affiliate (Workers' Liberty) and was also canvassed as a possibility in the International Socialist Organisation National Executive document for the ISO's December 7-8 national conference.

4. ***Affirms that the challenge of higher unity remains present, even while endorsing the decisions of the DSP Political Committee and National Executive to withdraw the proposal to Congress to convert the DSP into a tendency within the Socialist Alliance (along with the party's specific offers concerning Green Left Weekly and Resistance Centres operating as activist centres and multi-tendency bookshops).*** The ultimatum of the ISO to abandon the Alliance if the DSP voted to transform itself into a tendency

within the Alliance left the party with no option but to withdraw that proposal—the very future of the Alliance was at stake. At the same time the DSP's withdrawal of the offer of a negotiated relationship between Socialist Alliance and *Green Left Weekly* and Resistance Centres has freed the Alliance debate to focus on the political arguments in favour of higher unity. Yet, despite this forced retreat, it is the real Australian political situation and the real development of the Alliance—and not the subjective desires of the DSP—which continues to pose the challenge of how, when and in what form the Alliance should strive for higher levels of unity. For the DSP the key objective preconditions (sufficient level of programmatic agreement, the felt political need for socialist unity among many Alliance members and supporters) already exist: the fundamental issue now is how prepared the Alliance affiliates are to address the challenge of unity.

5. ***Recommits the party to the struggle for a higher level of unity within the Alliance.*** The most important task for the DSP in the coming period is to commit its forces—together with those within the Alliance who agree with or can be convinced of our general perspective—to the struggle for greater unity. That perspective not only means that the DSP will allocate resources to develop the areas of joint work agreed upon, but that the Alliance itself should also address the issue of what resources it needs to broadcast the socialist message as effectively as possible. In this context Congress welcomes the ISO's statement that it understands the need to make greater resources available to the Alliance.

6. ***Affirms the DSP's commitment to making as useful a contribution as possible to the Alliance debate.*** While the DSP remains committed to the goal of the Alliance being transformed into a multi-tendency socialist party, this is a perspective for which we will seek to win support through the democratic processes of the Alliance. The DSP will devote all its energies to convincing Alliance members of the validity of our approach, but whether it is realised will be determined by the Alliance's own debate and decision-making processes. The DSP intervention in the Alliance debate will need to focus on making an accurate and objective analysis of the real shifts taking place in Australian politics and on how best the political openings these provide can be grasped by the Alliance. This is also the best framework within which to carry forward the discussion on the outstanding differences among affiliates—as they

impact on the Alliance's ability to meet the real challenges of politics.

7. ***Recognises the need for the May 2003 National Conference of the Socialist Alliance to take decisions on basis of the common experience of the Alliance.*** The Alliance will arrive at its May 2003 National Conference with common experience in many areas of work behind it. Making a balance sheet of this work and charting the way forward in such areas as the trade unions, anti-war and refugee rights campaigns, women's liberation and youth work should form an important part of the conference—along with the assessment of our work in the electoral arena. The DSP's practical proposals to the conference (and to the Socialist Alliance National Executive) will be conditioned by the development of this work, along with the positions and interventions of the other affiliates in the Alliance debate. In developing its proposals the party will continue to act in the spirit with which it has acted to date—arguing strongly for our viewpoint but always trying to move ahead on the basis of consensus or the largest possible majority.

8. ***Empowers our incoming National Committee, National Executive and/or Political Committee, after consultation with DSP branches and districts and supporters of our general perspective, to raise any specific proposal that is judged to advance left unity.*** The particular form and timing of the proposals that the DSP will put forward in order to advance left unity at the Socialist Alliance May 2003 National Conference (and beyond) will be conditioned by the degree of support they receive from unaligned Alliance members as well as the positions of the other affiliates. While the party should work to develop a broadly supported, concrete proposal as soon as possible—in order to allow thorough debate within the Alliance—the detailed form of the proposals it advances can only be settled after extensive consultation.

9. ***Empowers our incoming National Committee to decide if and when the Democratic Socialist Party should cease to build itself publicly and become a tendency within the Socialist Alliance.*** At a certain point along the road to higher unity within the Alliance it will become possible to convert the DSP into an internal tendency within the Alliance. The conditions needed for that to take place cannot be established in advance: the judgement is therefore entrusted to the DSP National Committee, the highest decision-making body of the party between congresses. This Congress empowers the incoming National Committee to implement that decision. ■

Craig Johnston: 'I'd like to see a united socialist party'

[This article is reprinted from Green Left Weekly issue 524.]

Trade union militant Craig Johnston was the Victorian secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union between 1998 and August last year. Respected for his integrity and militancy, Johnston is a leader of the Workers First grouping in the AMWU. He joined the Socialist Alliance in 2001. He spoke to Green Left Weekly's GRAHAM MATTHEWS about the future of the alliance.

Why did you join the Socialist Alliance?

Like a lot of people who have been disillusioned with the Labor Party, I saw it as an opportunity to build some real unity and an alternative on the left.

I joined the Progressive Labour Party when that was set up. I thought that was a project worth supporting. Unfortunately, [because of] a lot of petty personality politics, that fell over.

We need to build a political party that, in the long run will take on a revolutionary nature, but at least is an electoral alternative to the other political parties and is a party that will campaign for issues that are important to workers and other disadvantaged groups.

What do you think the Socialist Alliance has achieved?

I suppose the biggest thing is that we've started to build some unity among the various left groups. One of the problems that workers have had relating to the various left groups is that they're like sects—there's so many of them. And their differences, while probably very important and strongly felt, are a bit hard for many workers to understand. Unity is one of the biggest things that we emphasise within the AMWU.

[The Socialist Alliance] has also been at the forefront of a number of very important campaigns and also works with the trade unions. And in the future we hope and expect the Alliance will do a lot more.

The Alliance is a political party that understands militant unionists' concerns, and hopefully will address and support those concerns. Militant unionists can bring to the alliance practical campaigning experience, strategies and techniques that they've learned over the years, and a lot of working-class experience.

Do you think that greater socialist unity through the Socialist Alliance as envisaged by the Democratic Socialist Party is possible and desirable? What do you think of the DSP's proposal to reconstitute itself as a tendency of

the alliance? Do you think the alliance should move toward a united socialist party?

When [the DSP's proposal] was first announced, my initial reaction was "good". Then I noticed there was some angst from some of the other parties [affiliated to the Alliance] and I thought it was best if the DSP pulled back, and it did.

Having now heard more of the debate, I think that if the DSP wants to do that, it should, without it putting any pressure on the other affiliates to dissolve into the party.

I'd like to see—whether it's in two or five years' time, or two or five weeks' time—a united socialist party. Speaking to people from the Scottish Socialist Party, [in that party] groups have come together and worked very successfully on many campaigns and achieved some electoral success.

So how important do you think the differences between the left groups are?

Well obviously, there's more that unites them than divides them. How important those issues are, is how important individuals see them as. I don't see them as very important, but I'm not a member of one of those groups.

I think that people can't be forced. There has to be a process where they can feel comfortable with it. But for example, if we got one person elected into parliament—not that that is going to make a lot of difference—but it would then show that socialism is once again popular. We don't seem to be getting our views out amongst the masses.

I'd hate to see anyone withdraw [from the Socialist Alliance]. My understanding of the proposal from the DSP is that nobody else has to disband, it's just something that it wants to do. That doesn't mean that the other groups can't stay in, because at the moment it is an alliance, it is not a fully fledged united party.

I hope that people don't withdraw, because then they'll consign themselves to the level of the small sects that run around everywhere. While they all do a little bit, I think they have a lot less chance of having an effect and making real change in small, tiny groups.

I've heard some of the debates between the groups, and I can't understand the fears that some of the other groups have of the [DSP] proposal. Some of the reasons given to me really didn't, in my view, stack-up. ■

Socialist Alliance debate sparks discussion about revolutionary regroupment

By Alison Thorne (Freedom Socialist Party)

There is a discussion inside the Socialist Alliance about which way forward. In late August 2002, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) announced plans to dramatically change how it would work as part of the Socialist Alliance. The DSP outlined a process which would result in its ceasing to operate as a public organisation, instead functioning as a tendency within the Socialist Alliance. Other affiliates—including the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP)—rejected the DSP’s unilateral approach, its focus on organisational rather than political questions and its January 2003 time frame. The DSP has since withdrawn its timeline but not its plan. Socialist Alliance activists and affiliate organisations are currently discussing the nature of Socialist Alliance. This discussion has also sparked a renewed interest in exploring the concept of revolutionary regroupment.

The FSP made its first public comment about the way forward for Socialist Alliance on 8 September, 2002. Alison Thorne, Melbourne Branch Organiser and a member of the Socialist Alliance National Executive, spoke as part of a panel at the International Socialist Organisation-sponsored Marxism 2002 conference. Our view is that it is not the vehicle for revolutionary regroupment. The full text of this speech can be found at http://www.socialist-alliance.org/debate_fsp.shtml Contributions to the discussion by other Socialist Alliance affiliates and activists can be found at <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/debate.shtml>

Below, Thorne outlines some of the key ideas the FSP thinks must be discussed as part of any effort to advance regroupment of the revolutionary left.

People with a broad interest in socialism often ask why there are so many different left groups and why we all can’t just get together. This is a very good question. After all, we all seem to agree on many of the basic questions, we’re all selling our newspapers and all working to win new people to socialism.

But there is a reason why the different socialist organisations exist—on many important questions, we simply don’t agree.

The Socialist Alliance, formed nearly two years ago, was a very interesting and exciting initiative. It sought to identify areas of broad agreement in order to unite socialists from eight

diverse socialist organisations, as well as many individual activists, around these limited but shared goals.

The Alliance has achieved a lot in its short history by focusing on the areas of agreement and working together on this basis. Within this framework, we have worked together extremely well. But our differences have not gone away. We just put them to one side while we pursued our shared goals.

Unity in action isn’t regroupment

The DSP presented its proposal—to cease building itself in favour of operating as a tendency within Socialist Alliance—as “a big step forward toward left regroupment in Australia.”

We disagree. The FSP draws a clear distinction between coalitions and united fronts, which are based on unity in action around agreed goals, and revolutionary regroupment. Regroupment is something which may be achieved after a thorough process of discussion around program. Exploration could take place to see if there is sufficient agreement for revolutionaries from two or more tendencies to fuse into one larger organisation.

As part of the discussion inside the Alliance, members of the DSP continue to place their emphasis on how well we’ve worked together on practical tasks together and on other organisational questions such as resources. But a decision by revolutionaries to fuse into a single revolutionary party is a political, not an organisational question.

Rather than being an effective vehicle for regroupment, Socialist Alliance is the opposite. That is hardly surprising. To date, all participants within Socialist Alliance have worked hard to preserve unity around our agreed, but limited, platform and goals. The goodwill on everyone’s part, concentrating on areas of agreement in order to keep the Alliance on track, mitigates against exploring programmatic differences.

SA affiliates know which issues divide us and understand why we are not in a single revolutionary party. Our differences are real and centre on questions which can be life or death issues in situations of explosive class struggle.

The last 70 years are littered with examples of unprincipled combinations, splits and purges. Devoid of an open, principled discussion of both differences and agreement, the DSP’s proposals

risk throwing the historic Socialist Alliance project onto the same scrapheap.

The centrality of feminism

The Freedom Socialist Party is a Trotskyist feminist party—both our Trotskyism and our feminism are non-negotiable. It's a key difference between ourselves and all other SA affiliates.

While it's true that the DSP also calls itself feminist, its conception of feminism is very different from our own revolutionary feminism. The DSP focuses narrowly on women's rights, rather than on how feminism is integral to revolutionary struggle. The DSP does not allow women within its own organisation to form a caucus, presumably because this is "divisive".

However, organisations have disintegrated under the weight of internal sexism. The Black Panther Party in the U.S. was destroyed by rampant sexism. The Workers Revolutionary Party in Britain imploded as a result of a sexist culture which tolerated women comrades being sexually abused. The right of oppressed groups to form caucuses is not an abstract question, but, we believe, is key to combating sexism, racism and homophobia which, because of the pressures of capitalist ideology, can manifest themselves in even the most revolutionary organisations.

We call ourselves feminists because we recognise that the struggle for women's complete equality lies at the heart of the class struggle—and at the same time reaches out to women of all classes and races, attracting them to the banner of working class revolution. We also recognise that feminism has a dual nature. Like the struggle against racism, it is at once independent of and dialectically interwoven with the class struggle.

Freedom Socialist Party leaders Clara Fraser and Susan Williams explain this in their essay *Socialist Feminism: "Where the Battle of the Sexes Resolves Itself"*. They say: "the woman question has historically been indissolubly linked to the class struggle". All women, regardless of class, are subjected to political, legal, cultural and economic discrimination, and this subjugation as an entire sex confers an independent character on woman's struggle.

The patriarchal capitalist class relies on women for the extraction of unpaid domestic labour, and simultaneously exploits women in still another way—as a vast pool of cheap labour. That is why the bourgeoisie can no more eradicate sexism than it can eliminate racism, which provides similar economic super-benefits to capital: all wage exploitation would have to go in the bargain.

The terrible survival problems of women, therefore, can be solved only by fundamental change, and feminist demands lead logically and irresistibly toward the clear necessity for socialist revolution.

Our revolutionary feminism challenges the view that the "real working class" is the straight, white, male, blue collar workers. There is a sociologically entrenched layer of highly paid, straight, white, male workers, who may fire up industrially to defend their own privileges, but whose political backwardness and lack of solidarity makes them an enormous social support to the capitalist class.

Russian revolutionary leader, Vladimir Lenin, described the conservative role of this layer in his book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. He said:

It is quite possible to bribe the labour leaders and the upper stratum of the labour aristocracy. And the capitalists of the "advanced" countries are bribing them: they bribe them in a thousand different ways, direct and indirect, overt and covert.

This stratum of bourgeoisified workers, or the "labour aristocracy," who are quite philistine in their mode of life, in the size of their earnings and in their outlook are the agents of the bourgeoisie in the labour movement, the labour lieutenants of the capitalist class, real channels of reformism and chauvinism.

Clara Fraser concurs: "white skin privilege, male chauvinism, and heterosexism have turned millions of workers into lackeys of the boss, shorn of class consciousness and permeated with elitism. This is the social base of the labour bureaucracy." So writes Fraser, in "On the Dialectics of U.S. 'Backwardness'." (www.socialism.com/library/backward.html)

Feminism is not some optional add-on. Women's leadership is key to the emancipation of humanity.

The role of the working class in global revolution. The theory of permanent revolution is another crucial political question distinguishing different tendencies within Socialist Alliance.

In a 1982 article in the Freedom Socialist newspaper, Murry Weiss and Robert Crisman succinctly defined the idea: "Permanent Revolution is the process of worldwide, uninterrupted, and uninterruptible struggle of all oppressed people, led by the proletariat, for economic, social and political liberation."

Permanent Revolution describes how, inevitably, all of the tasks of revolution—both democratic and socialist, fall to the working class. Why? Because in the era of imperialism, the

capitalist class is neither willing nor able to fulfil basic democratic demands. This theory is in contrast to the formalistic position, best exemplified by Stalinism, that first it is necessary to have a democratic, capitalist revolution and then, at some unspecified time in the future, the working class will be in a position to make a socialist revolution. Because the DSP uses a version of this scheme, we consider it to have some of the features of Stalinism in its program.

Permanent Revolution is one of the theoretical cornerstones of Trotskyism, which the DSP abandoned several years ago as it moved away from its Trotskyist origins to its current politics.

Not only the theory of Permanent Revolution, but history itself, show that revolutions do not unfold according to a pre-ordained plan. The Russian Revolution confirmed this brilliantly. Someone forgot to tell Lenin that the “pre-ordained plan” mandated that once feudalism had been toppled, the workers should hand over leadership to the bourgeoisie for decades to come. Just weeks after the “democratic” revolution of February, 1917, he called on the workers to challenge the provisional government and raised the demand, “All Power to the Soviets!” Six months later, backward Russia made a socialist revolution!

Of course, the Russian Revolution was defeated, although it took 74 years for capitalism to do so. Yet, this, too, validates Permanent Revolution. The flip side of a Stalinist “staged theory” of revolution is that there can be socialism in one country. The fact that the Soviet Workers State is no longer there gives the lie to that dead-end ideology.

The question of Permanent Revolution is just as relevant today. The example of Indonesia shows why. Tossed together by imperialism from the remnants of various colonial empires, the oppressed nationalities of Indonesia were subjugated by brutal military rule from Jakarta. When the people finally overthrew the dictator Suharto, the country started to fall apart. Nations renewed the struggle for independence, and rightwing terror squads have killed tens of thousands from Aceh to East Timor. The country is tearing itself to pieces. Capitalist rule has manifestly failed in Indonesia, fulfilling few of the democratic tasks, such as national unity, emancipation of the peasants and universal suffrage. What can fulfil these tasks, and solve the national liberation struggles without starving the Javanese of food and resources? Only a socialist revolution, led by the united working class of all the nations of the archipelago and aided and defended by the workers of the region’s core capitalist countries, chiefly Australia. That means, of course, that the liberation of the workers and nations of

Indonesia are intimately bound up with a revolution in this country.

Speaking of core capitalist countries, the necessity of revolution in the United States of America is a fundamental political question which many socialists ignore. Because of its economic and military weight, the U.S. is the centre of world capitalism. This also makes it central to world revolution. U.S. revolutionary, James P. Cannon, first insisted on the central importance and very real prospect of U.S. revolt in his 1946 *Theses on the American Revolution*.

Permanent Revolution is not only about the emancipation of the peoples of colonised nations. It’s about ridding the whole planet of capitalism. Anti-Americanism is a feature of Australian political debate, as if the working people of the United States are responsible for the depredations of the U.S. government and ruling class. The dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975 after interference from the CIA is the source of much of the animosity. Yet if the working class of the U.S. got organised to stop such meddling, it would not occur. More than this, if we were to make a revolution here, without a similar uprising by U.S. workers, we would be crushed by U.S. imperialism, and sooner rather than later.

The day-to-day effects of the class struggle vary between countries. But capitalism, and its failures, are global. The working class is the revolutionary class—everywhere. Whether it be the starvation wages of Brazilian workers, the genocide of Australia’s Indigenous Nations or the subjugation of women in peasant slavery, only the working class—in all its diversity—has the political experience and the social weight to end misery for once and for all. Without stopping to comply with some artificial plan about how it’s done.

Dissolve? No thanks! The Freedom Socialist Party believes that these revolutionary feminist ideas represent the program required to emancipate humanity. Do the other affiliates in Socialist Alliance agree? No.

So, should the Freedom Socialist Party ditch revolutionary feminism and join those who see blue collar workers engaged in heavy industrial production as having the real social weight and power? Should we be satisfied with the demands of women and queers being optional extras—defined merely as questions of democratic rights? Should we advise the tiny East Timorese working class not to struggle to make a socialist revolution but to confine themselves to the bourgeois democratic tasks of capitalist nation building? Again, no!

But does this mean that we can’t work with other socialists with whom we have disagreements

on these fundamental questions? Of course we can work together!

We have been working and will continue to work together around the very important agreed goals and objectives of Socialist Alliance. But let us not mistake what we have achieved—impressive as it is—as the precursor for revolutionary regroupment.

The Freedom Socialist Party—through a process of recruitment and regroupment—is working to create a mass revolutionary vanguard party made up of committed activists who have reached the conclusion that only a socialist revolution can bring about the beginning of the end of oppression. A party made up of members who understand that revolution will not happen spontaneously and needs to be organised.

The capitalist State is the most tightly organised institution in history, and globalisation is increasing centralised control through technology, anti-

democratic laws and the use of the police, the military and spy agencies. To resist the State apparatus, let alone rid the world of its scourge, we need to be just as organised as the State itself.

The Freedom Socialist Party will proudly continue building our international tendency with no apologies. We invite Socialist Alliance members—and everybody else—interested to talk more about revolutionary feminism to check us out. If you agree with us—join! And then work with us inside Socialist Alliance to continue forging an active, democratic and diverse united front which is the much-needed bold and vibrant socialist voice for working people.

[This article was originally published in Freedom Socialist Bulletin Number 28. For information or subscription details write to PO Box 266 West Brunswick Vic 3055. Phone: 03-9386-5065 or e-mail: fsprwaus@ozemail.com.au]. ■

Revolutionary feminism and socialist unity

By Pat Brewer

[This article is reprinted from Green Left Weekly number 526. This is a reply to a shortened version of the above article by Alison Thorne which appeared in Green Left Weekly number 525.]

Is the Democratic Socialist Party a revolutionary feminist party? Not really, according to Alison Thorne, a leading member of the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP). The DSP, Thorne argued in her contribution on the future of the Socialist Alliance (SA) in last week's *Green Left Weekly*, has no claim to revolutionary feminism because in some way it waters down its support for women's liberation to simply an issue of democratic rights and doesn't allow a women's caucus internally.

Thorne's criticisms of the DSP's approach to the struggle against women's oppression was made within the context of a more general argument as to why left regroupment—the uniting of the socialist left into a single party—is not a possible option for the future development of the SA. Such left regroupment, Thorne argued, is only possible after a “thorough process of discussion around program”.

She cited the question of revolutionary feminism as an example of the programmatic differences that exist between the DSP and the FSP, supposedly precluding these two affiliates of the SA functioning within a single, multi-tendency, socialist party. Instead of regarding the SA as providing a vehicle for left regroupment, Thorne

argued that the alliance should be restricted to being an action-based coalition (a “united front”).

This response to Thorne's arguments will only address her accusations about the DSP's position on women's liberation.

Revolutionary feminism

Given the centrality that Thorne attaches to feminism in assessing the programmatic differences among the SA affiliates, it is quite disappointing that her allegations against the DSP are not backed up with any facts.

For example, Thorne claims that the “DSP focuses narrowly on women's rights, rather than on how feminism is integral to revolutionary struggle”. Is she claiming that the DSP only supports struggles for formal legal rights and is therefore reformist not revolutionary? This is what her allegation implies, but she provides her readers with no evidence from either the DSP's documents or its practice to back it up.

Any examination of the actual practice of the DSP shows we have made the struggle against women's oppression a central aspect of our political activity since our formation in 1972. We have actively participated in the struggle for women's control over their reproduction and fertility. Within the trade union movement, we took up working women's demands through the Working Women's Charter campaign. We have combated sex

segregation and discrimination in industry through the Jobs for Women campaign in Wollongong in the 1980s.

We have been central to maintaining and building the International Women's Day rallies and marches—the main annual feminist mobilisation—for more than a decade now.

We continue to struggle to make equal wages a reality not just a formality, while recognising that achieving the formality of equal wages in law was a step forward for women.

At the same time, we have combated the ideological arguments and sexist stereotyping that are used by the capitalist rulers to justify and perpetuate women's oppression.

The DSP's analysis of women's liberation and its relationship to the struggle for socialism is summarised in the slogan "No women's liberation without socialist revolution! No socialist revolution without women's liberation!"

The DSP's program spells out what we mean by this. It states: "The struggle for women's liberation poses the problem of the total reorganisation of society from its smallest repressive unit—the family—to its largest—the state. The liberation of women demands a thoroughgoing restructuring of society's productive and reproductive institutions in order to maximise social welfare and establish a truly human existence for all. Without the socialist revolution, women will not be able to establish the material conditions for their liberation. Without the conscious and equal participation of broad masses of women, the working class will not be able to carry through the socialist revolution."

If this isn't revolutionary feminism, what does such a term mean?

Women's caucuses

The second accusation Thorne makes against the DSP's revolutionary feminism concerns the question of the right to form a women's caucus within a revolutionary socialist party that is programmatically committed to the struggle for women's liberation.

On this issue, Thorne uses the method of argument of guilt by association, slur and innuendo. She cites the Black Panther Party in the USA and the Workers Revolutionary Party in Britain as being destroyed by "rampant sexism" because, presumably, they did not allow women and other members of specially oppressed groups the right to form caucuses. Since the DSP is opposed to the organisation of such internal caucuses, we too must be sexist. The right to form a women's caucus, Thorne argues, is key to combating sexism.

This confuses two different issues. A socialist party's commitment to the centrality of women's liberation in the struggle for socialism is a political question. The formation of a caucus is an organisational one.

If a party has no commitment to women's liberation in its activities, even if it is programmatically committed to women's liberation, an organisational form such as a women's caucus is not going to address the problem of sexism within its ranks. In fact, many socialist groups and parties with women's caucuses or collectives have encountered deep problems of sexism in their internal life because they have allowed the struggle for women's liberation to be marginal to their activities.

The DSP does not organise its members on the basis of gender, race or any other non-political criteria. We organise our members on the basis of the party's political activity. We organise into working groups ("fractions") all those party members engaged in a particular area of political work.

We don't think having within the DSP separate and exclusive caucuses based purely on gender will address sexism if it arises within the party nor deal with a lack of commitment to raising the struggle against women's oppression. Such questions are a responsibility for the party as a whole to tackle, not marginalised or swept under the carpet as exclusively "women's business".

As a party, we seek to create the best possible conditions to help women members become confident leaders of our organisation in all the areas of work it engages in.

This, however, does not mean that we don't support the formation of women's caucuses in other organisations that do not have a practical commitment to women's liberation. But this is not an organisational template to be imposed regardless of the political situation; it is a question of tactics in concrete political situations.

For example, in the trade unions we support the formation of women's caucuses to develop policies to overcome discrimination and the material conditions of oppression as well as the confidence to take these policies into the official union bodies and fight for their inclusion as a central part of the union's aims. But if a union leadership is committed to championing the demands in the interests of all the union's members, which of course include demands in the interests of women workers, then a women's caucus may not be necessary.

The FSP's position of advocating women's caucuses as the means to combat sexism within a

revolutionary feminist organisation reflects a real political difference with the DSP. Unfortunately, Thorne did not clearly articulate wherein the difference lies.

From reading the documents of the US FSP it appears that the comrades view the struggle against women's oppression as the central issue in the struggle for socialism. They arrive at this position because they view women as being the most oppressed part of the working class and, therefore, the "most" potentially revolutionary—the implication being that women workers are inherently more capable of struggling for socialism

than male workers. This is certainly a view that is not shared by the DSP.

Whether I am misinterpreting FSP views or not is a discussion to pursue at a more leisurely pace while we continue to work together to build the Socialist Alliance. But I would hope that future discussion of our differences will be conducted in a more honest manner than Thorne treated them in her article in *GLW*.

[Pat Brewer is a member of the national committee of the DSP and has been an active feminist for more than 25 years.] ■

Against the oppression of lesbians and gay men

[This document was formulated as part of the Socialist Alliance's NSW election campaign.]

The Socialist Alliance supports the political independence and self-organisation of the gay and lesbian liberation movement. We support all struggles against discrimination and oppression of women, lesbians and gay men, transgenders, people with HIV and sex workers.

While much has been gained over the last 30 years, we still have a long way to go to achieve full liberation.

- We are still faced by the reluctance of the NSW Labor government to equalise the age of consent for gay men.
- The churches by and large are still rabidly anti-homosexual; the Anti-Discrimination Act allows them to legally discriminate against us.
- The privatisation of welfare, health and education has pushed us further into the oppressive hands of the churches.
- The education system remains largely hostile: kids are still bullied in schools; most teachers dare not come out; the anti-homophobia kit remains optional, so most schools opt out!
- We are still discriminated against in superannuation.
- We still cannot adopt children.

The list goes on.

Lesbians, gay men, and transgenders can resist and overcome these obstacles by organising ourselves, through mass action and public demonstrations, by lobbying, voting, and by building alliances with the broader working class, feminist, and anti-capitalist movements.

Policy statement

The Socialist Alliance supports politically independent and self-organising social movements that fight the oppression of women, lesbians and gay men, transgenders, people with HIV and sex workers through mass action, public demonstrations, lobbying, voting and by building alliances with the broader working class, feminist, and anti-capitalist movements.

We oppose sexism, racism, ageism, and discrimination against people with disabilities within the lesbian and gay communities, as we do in the broader community.

We support and campaign for the following demands.

- Retain "homosexuality" as a ground in NSW Anti-Discrimination Act.
- Strengthen NSW anti-discrimination law by removing exemptions for organisations run by religious groups.
- All public funding for education, youth, aged, health, employment and welfare to be directed through non-discriminatory government and/or secular non-profit community organisations.
- Reduce the age of consent for sex between men to 16 years.
- Legislate against use of non-violent homosexual "advance" as a defence of "provocation" in violent crime.
- No discrimination on the basis of homosexuality or transgenderism in child custody and adoption.
- Full social, legal, trade union and industrial recognition of same sex relationships.
- No discrimination in entitlements to welfare on the basis of relationship status, gender or sexual orientation.

- For the right of every worker to nominate who will inherit and benefit from their superannuation, irrespective of relationship status.
- State funding for anti-prejudice community education programs.
- Education in schools to incorporate positive material on homosexuality and transgender.
- State funding for rebuilding the Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras as a political celebration.
- State funding for gay, lesbian and transgender youth services, including an expansion of youth housing.
- Full union rights for workers in gay and lesbian services and businesses.
- Remove gender from identity documents such as birth certificates, drivers' licences, and passports.

The major parties 'tough on crime' approach is wrong!

[This document was formulated as part of the Socialist Alliance's NSW election campaign.]

It doesn't work!

The way Labor and Liberal are being "tough on crime" means that they are waiting until crime occurs then reacting. They announce big, tough sentences and increase police numbers, but do little and spend less on crime prevention.

The Socialist Alliance plans to focus on why people commit crime in the first place. Many studies have shown that the factors affecting offenders are poverty, inadequate education, intellectual disability, poor health, negative parent child relations, social inequality, racism, unemployment and general lack of opportunity in life. That's why our focus is on families, schools, housing, employment, refugee rights, workers rights and the health system to ensure that everyone has a fair share. That's where government money should be going not on building more and more jails!

Did you know

- It costs between \$165-\$208 per person per day to keep someone in prison!
- Labor spends almost as much on prisons (612 million) as it does on Community Services (641 million)!
- One police sniffer dog costs the same as *two* schoolteachers!

Labor and Liberal keep on trying to send more people to jail and for longer.

- A higher rate of imprisonment does not lead to a lower rate of crime. The United States has one of the highest prison populations and one of the highest crime rates in the world. In Australia, Victoria has one of the lowest crime rates and lowest imprisonment rates and the Northern Territory has the highest imprisonment and the

highest rate of violent crime, per head of population.

- Sending people to jail increases the likelihood that they will commit more crime! Going to jail decreases your chance of getting a job, increases family breakdown, limits opportunities for education etc. And while your in jail your learn more about how to commit more crimes!

- The prospect of a "tough sentence" very rarely deters people from committing crimes. At the time when a crime is being committed most people aren't stopping to think. Many are affected by mental illness, intellectual disability, drug dependency, poverty or social disadvantage.

- The Socialist Alliance will only use jail as an absolute last resort. We want to look more closely at states like Victoria, to see how new legislation in Western Australia (which prohibits jail terms of less than six months) is working and to learn more from countries like Finland (which has reduced it's prison population by two thirds with no increase in crime rates).

- Labor and Liberal are only focusing on some types of crime. They are not interested in dealing with issues such as tax avoidance, white collar crime, environmental crime, consumer fraud, corruption, price-fixing, mandatory detention of refugees (including children) who have committed no crime, simply tried to save their lives and our troops being committed to a war which the vast majority of Australians do not want to be involved in. These are crimes that often affect more people and involve greater social and economic costs than the crimes that hit the popular airwaves.

The Socialist Alliance plan to change this. We know that the tremendous wealth of Australia is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority. Only by ending the concentration of power in the hands

of that minority can the wealth that exists be used for the benefit of working people. Every major industry should be re-organised on the lines of social provision for need—publicly owned, and

democratically controlled by the workers and the community.

With thanks to Beyond Bars for information from their fact sheets.
<www.ncoss.org.au/beyond_bars>. ■

INTERVENTIONS

Speech to Illawarra Socialist Alliance NSW election campaign launch

By Naomi Arrowsmith

Comrades,

Who would have thought this slip of a girl from Bellambi would one day be running as a Socialist Alliance candidate for the NSW Upper House?

Well, probably quite a few people actually but maybe not the ALP.

I have been a union organiser for some nine or ten years and worked as an admin worker for unions for most of my late teens and adult life although I have done other jobs. Waitressing—but I only lasted one night—for a few years I worked as a school cleaner and had several clerical jobs in the private sector.

Foremost in my job as a union organiser is empowering and organising workers. Easy, some may think.

Unfortunately, workers have been able to fall so far behind that they can't see the issues or the enemy for the mortgage and the re-payments on the 4WD and young workers joining the workforce aren't informed about how their wages and conditions came about in the first place.

We are almost starting from scratch in getting workers organised and active in unions, their communities and in political activities.

My work as a union organiser has taught me many valuable lessons, one in particular, and I think it's something we should all heed. It is no good running too far ahead of the workers and therefore the community.

We need to be mindful that the political language we are speaking is a language the people understand. We need to be mindful that the issues that we push forward are actually the issues that are important to the people.

For instance, is the nationalisation of BHP the main issue for people or is it the cost of medical treatment, education for their children and childcare? The things they must face and deal with daily. The important issues for them. The nationalisation of BHP is something we can lead people towards once we know they are by our sides in the struggle and we know they understand why BHP should be nationalised.

We need to win their *hearts and minds*.

We have reached a very interesting and exciting stage in the process of bringing people forward and armed with information about the struggle.

Who would have thought that 5,000 people would turn up to the No War Rally on Saturday? 5,000 people we cannot afford to lose by using the wrong language, tactics or actions.

I was pleased that the flag burning (as much as I would like to burn the US flag myself) was stopped on Saturday – if it had been carried out we may have lost several hundred people (people who have never marched before) from the next form of action we take for peace.

Small tasks that actually get carried out are far better than big tasks or big steps that are too daunting and so given up on.

I watched the comrades who had the Socialist Alliance stall in the Mall last Friday and they did a great job in asking people to carry out small tasks. "Take a flyer...would you like to sign a petition...would you like a socialist alliance broadsheet...what do you think about coming to the rally on Saturday to show your concern about war...buy a badge...tell others..."

It works.

And I will guarantee that when those 5,000 got home they told their neighbours about the rally. We were there...it was safe...you should come next time.

Monday's *Illawarra Mercury* in the workplace would have stirred up many crib room discussions. I was at the rally...it was great...all different sorts of people.

It's a start—or re-start.

It is a long hard road—the ruling class have the money to fight us all the way—our achievements have been pushed back decades by the capitalist media and the ruling class.

I remember when my mother was 45 she said to us all "your father and I and both our families have been in the struggle for revolution for a very long time and we both now realise that we are not going to see the revolution in our life time".

Now here I am 45 in a few weeks time... and the struggle continues.

I believe that if Socialist Alliance pitches not to the converted but to the people who really need us

and that we talk to those people and find out their issues and take up their issues we will have them fighting along side us in the struggle.

The liberation of the working class is a job for the workers alone.

A toast to socialism, the growing success of Socialist Alliance and world peace. ■

DISCUSSION

Socialist Alliance and the NSW elections

By Bernie Rosen (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

Participation in election campaigns is a very important part of our activity. This was recognised by Frederick Engels.

We are disadvantaged by Stalinism and its evil legacy. The opponents of socialism are having and will continue to have a field day depicting Stalinism as socialism. However, we have an effective rejoinder that establishes our credibility as advocates for social progress. The litmus test is: who stands for higher living standards for workers, pensioners and students who are on small allowances?

Those who claim that the evil of Stalinism constitutes socialism are the opponents of wage and pension increases. They are opposed to the removal of the levy on pharmaceutical benefits and they are opposed to the restoration of federal finance for dental care for pensioners. They are also the opponents of free tertiary education and the modest claims of the ACTU.

That is their political credentials. Their classification could only be described as bosses' men and the women who say the same are no different.

I was very impressed by a booklet entitled *The Red North* by Jim McIlroy. It is a healthy sign that we are learning from our past as to what we should do and what we should avoid doing.

I would like to commend for reading the life of Percy Brookfield by Gilbert Giles Roper. We should also be familiar with the achievements of Fred Patterson, Communist Party member for Bowen (1944-1950) and Harry Scott-Bennett, socialist member for Bendigo (1906-1908).

Socialists should also know about Monty Miller who fought in the Eureka Stockade in 1854 and in many struggles until his death in 1920. On his death bed, he was told about the formation of the Communist Party on the 30th October 1920. He gave it his support. We can trace our political lineage to Monty Miller whom R.D. Walsh in a political essay described as the real hero of the Eureka Stockade.

The lesson that stands out from these eminent historical personages is that they all participated in their electorates around issues that their constituents regarded as important.

Our Socialist Alliance candidates should do the same if we are to win and increase our electoral support. On the basis of contemporary political evidence, it could be a long range project. On the other hand events that we cannot anticipate or predict could bring about a more receptive and sympathetic attitude of the working class to our policies.

Our candidates who are standing for the Legislative Council require a realistic rural policy to include bushfire control and prevention, water conservation, financial assistance to struggling farmers, reduction of freight costs, scientific advice to those engaged in farming for a livelihood and legislation to compel banks that have closed to reopen in country towns and cities. Also, continued opposition to the sale of Telstra.

These ideas merit consideration in preparation for the forthcoming state election and those that will be held in the future. ■

Socialist Alliance: A Contribution To The Debate

By Dave Kerin (Wills Branch)

I sit here, a worker who does not write well, trying to formulate what I want to say in language that will not lose my audience, and yet will be direct, open and honest.

I have come from yet another good meeting of the historical left, which gave so much in the way of mobilizing to stop war, but which was also full of subtle put-downs and non-empathetic behavior, and which therefore showed us the existential pre-conditions for war. I know that I contribute to this,

too; I want to smash people whom I see strip another's dignity away.

That feeling is the primary emotion which drove me into the folds of the historical left — a hatred of injustice; the demand for dignity.

Surely dignity is the heart of left politics. For only with dignity are we living in connection. Only in connection, in the collective, can people be truly empowered.

Indeed the difference between the historical left and historical right is, for me, around that central point: interconnection. The right behaves as though separation were true and builds personal and social constructs which replicate that separation: hierarchy, class, gender inequity and controlling/power-constructs which cause massive social pain, because they are based upon the illusion of separation.

The historical left has always had a notion of solidarity which when unpacked rests upon an often ill-defined sense of interconnection, what Nisker is referring to when he says:

...the holy can be seen inscribed in the veins of the leaves and in the vessels of our blood. Nature is the medium that nurtured our consciousness as well as our imagination, and therefore is the mother of all realities...

The historical left, both political and religious, has been responsible for embodying the best, empathetic traditions: that history of the fight for justice and for a better world, from the slave revolts through to today's workers' and social movements. We and our forebears have been struggling within the struggle against injustice as well; we have witnessed slaves become rulers, we have seen the results of the Napoleonic urge, and there is evidence in living memory of the results of Stalinism's dictatorship.

However none of that stops us struggling against injustice, nor deters us from struggling within the struggle.

But with all this struggle where is the liberation, the joy? Well, you see, and this is where I ask some of you who may wish at this stage to stop reading to bear with me, I believe that it is in quiet reflection, unfilled with radio, television, reading or any other activity, where one answer lies. The mind-body as part of that natural and evolving nature, when trusted and given a chance to simply "be" taps us straight back into our interconnected roots.

Alongside the slave revolts, serf uprisings, resistance to the break up of the early Commons, and the rise of the democratic and socialist movements were always the various attempts by humankind to practice being.

And once again some of those traditions/attempts were of the right, resting upon ideologies of separation and practices that resulted in oppressive hierarchy, class and war. Some however, both religious and humanist, were liberatory, engendering openness, inclusivity, power-sharing.

The 400 year tradition of the Quakers for instance: gender equality; beginnings of prison

reform; their raising the need for land rights in the first, colonial days of Australia; early support for early notions of workers' democracy and all combined with a practice-based tradition of meditation which attached no creed to itself. It's one and only admonition: "To approach the light in each person".

Much of modern zen (the tradition I work within) which provides a practice-based tradition enabling a person to self-manage their own efforts towards effortlessness, towards a joy in the experience of our very interconnection.

OK, OK, I know, your out of here. Nice bloke (sometimes), but obviously Dave's had too long at the coal face. That may be true; goodness knows as I suggested at the beginning, being often at the center of our movements' dysfunctionality has broken and cynicised many.

However, I do not give you this small glimpse of my deepest feelings with a view to winning anybody to a particular belief system.

I simply wish to indicate that there is a massive community of the historical left out there, and a massive working class movement out there, which is eclectic, and which you may find is the other side of weird, but which is none-the-less the many-blossomed garden which is our class. And if I can paraphrase Marx's notion of the class-for-itself, we have said as the historical left that we need to be both blossom and gardener.

To provide a space within which our fellow workers find support, challenge, a capacity to fight for the collective need and good; to build a movement of consensus and deep democracy which in its means and ends begins to "create the new world within the shell of the old"; to build an organization capable of providing the transition from inequity, war and class division to "a world where many worlds can abide," as the Zapatistas say. Although you may choose different words, are not these some of the tasks for us?

Have not these always been the tasks? For socialists, libertarians, communists and liberation theologians, are not these still some of the primary tasks? So, how to proceed?

If we start from the premise that we become what we do, then I would say that we in the left, in what has been the first world, under the pressure of the entire 20th Century, has become a parody of the founders. Often in the Libertarian movement we rebel without very much attention to the dignity of fellow workers; the socialist movement within the social democratic parties has been largely outflanked by its own inappropriate responses to position and power and mistakes that for the real world; communism lives under the horrible weight

of Stalinism or the Trotskyist response to it, where we see argument about formulaic politics.

Socialist Alliance provides us with the chance to step outside of our separate squares, and to allow the discomfort of that to remain open.

There is much we do not know, however collective effort will see us find the appropriate means. We need to engage our fellow workers in the search for these appropriate means.

Most of us in Socialist Alliance have been doing that over enough years now to have some answers. I for instance have never met a co-worker yet who opposed the notion of democratic controls within the economy; I have never met a fellow worker in 33 years of active life who supported environmental destruction and who would not support transition to sustainable jobs; I have never met a person who, given enough time to dialogue could maintain a racist view, unless it was under circumstances where we had ascertained major trauma and suffering in that person's life which they agreed had skewed their views; I am telling you nothing you do not know in your hearts, and you could each add to this list.

What I have run into however is by now, thousands of fellow workers who have many valid questions about the transition and about the shape of any future democracy.

Are we in the left assisting in real terms in finding answers to these questions? We spend some of our time doing that, but we spend an inordinate amount of time stressing our separation from each other and from workers who have not recognized our leadership potential.

Please understand, I include myself in this mess too. The answer?

- Acceptance of the mess. After all there is some pathology around all of this, where seemingly rational people continue to repeat the same action harder and harder, after each occasion on which it fails.

- A commitment to live with each other through the messiness, inexactitude, answerlessness and not knowing, trusting that getting relationships with each other and our fellow workers right on the things that matter (building dignity) will see the development of appropriate means.

- Socialist Alliance schools in alliance-building, relationship work around building dignity, community development.

- A return to the practice of bringing out a number of joint publications, and to host joint stalls at major events.

- Socialist Alliance Transition Workshops in environment and jobs; democratisation of superannuation (the unused component of the workers' wage); the demands around investment in the new jobs—solar, wind and water energy, rainwater, organics, etc; union cooperatives; work and life for people of colour within the white economy—the NTEU experience; Gender equity in work and life.

- A mentoring program to introduce, induct, and assist with relationship building for members across the workers and social movements.

- Language and concepting forums to eliminate communications problems.

These are just some of the sorts of things that I believe we need to be discussing now/are capable of, and I raise them in a spirit of comradeship and hope. Thank you. ■

On Comrade John Tully's contribution

By Graham Matthews (Seat of Melbourne branch)

Comrade John Tully from Socialist Democracy makes a very useful contribution to the discussion of the way forward for Socialist Alliance (Volume 2, Number 7, December 2002). John makes a range of suggestions for how the Alliance should evolve, its relative weaknesses and its relationship to the Greens, set against an analysis of the Victorian state election of November 30, 2002. Much of what John argues deserves further elaboration. Many of the projections he makes for the Alliance, while pointing a way forward, demand an Alliance which is more organised and well-resourced than it is today. While formally arguing against greater

socialist unity through the Alliance, many of John's suggestions would in fact demand it if they were to succeed.

John begins his discussion with an analysis of the Victorian state election. John argues a rather disparaging view of the Victorian state elections.

The vote for the hard left was down drastically—Steve Jolly's vote in Richmond, for instance, was down by almost 10 per cent, and our vote in Northcote was a fraction of that achieved earlier by the Progressive Labour Party (PLP).

John goes on to point out that we received a third of the vote of the Citizens Electoral Council

state wide – although noting that they stood in more seats than us.

In fact, almost 3600 of the votes Steve Jolly (from the Socialist Party) received in 1999 flowed to the Greens in 2002 — his vote went from 4213 (or 12.02 per cent) to 629 (or 1.99 per cent). The PLP vote in Northcote in 1999 (with only three candidates contesting) was 7.93 per cent , while that of the Socialist Alliance in 2002 was 1.81 per cent — against a vote for the Greens of over 25 per cent in the electorate. As for the Citizens Electoral Council — these “LaRouchite maddies” ran in 18 seats across the state — 13 more than the Socialist Alliance. In most seats they contested, their vote was derisory. Most of their votes ranged from about 0.85 per cent to about 1.5 per cent. In the electorate of Derrimut, they received 8.74 per cent — they were the only third candidate (to Labor and Liberal). In this seat alone they received over 2500 of their 9654 votes. In fact the CEC ran in the two (only) lower house seats not contested by the Greens. A fact which boosted their state-wide vote very significantly.

Seen against the phenomenal rise of the Green vote (and compared to that of Steve Jolly for instance) the consciously socialist vote for Socialist Alliance was as good as could have been reasonably expected. In fact in some notable areas, we received even more. In Norlane in north Geelong for instance (a working class area), the Alliance candidate received almost 4.5 per cent of the vote at one booth.

The real strength of the election for Socialist Alliance was not however the vote. It was rather the support we mobilised. One day before the December 1 rally against war on Iraq, Socialist Alliance mobilised over 200 people in a campaign against war and for socialism. At least 75 of those were not members of any affiliate of the Alliance. In addition, the Alliance managed to raise over \$8000 to completely fund the campaign in a little over a month, and letterboxed close to 100,000 campaign leaflets in five electorates state-wide. Certainly not everything that we wanted to do — but a marked improvement on our showing for the federal election just one year before. And all this with out one line of mainstream media coverage, apart from the brief bios in the free papers.

John Tully also argues that the Socialist Alliance Victorian state election campaign ignored the state issues of the campaign. Certainly the decision was taken at a state level to campaign primarily around the most pressing political issues — the war and refugees — as headlines of our campaign. But to claim that state issues were ignored does not hold up to scrutiny.

The Alliance campaign for Victoria made a point of demanding a reversal of Kennett’s privatisations (which Bracks has failed to implement). We demand that public transport, gas and electricity be placed back in public hands. We also demanded that the teaching jobs, the schools, and hospitals cut by Kennett (and not restored by Bracks) be returned. We demanded a repeal of all anti-abortion laws (a state issue), the implementation of industrial manslaughter legislation (dropped by Bracks days after his reelection), and a shorter working week with no loss in pay (why stop at 35 hours?). Our campaign leaflet *did* attack Bracks in no uncertain terms:

The Bracks’ government came to power three years ago on a wave of rejection of Jeff’s Kennett’s attacks. But has Bracks been much better? Public services remain in private hands. Funding to health and education has not been fully restored. The cuts carried out by Kennett have not been fully restored.

And again:

The Bracks government has attacked militant trade unionists, and set the police against anti-corporate protestors at the Crown Casino in September 2000. It is a Labor government whose priority is big business.

John is not alone in wanting better results for our campaigns. He is not alone in wanting to win seats. However, ignoring state issues has not been our problem. We must acknowledge that the shift to the left that has occurred has largely been absorbed by the Greens. The main question that we have to answer therefore is not so much what we did wrong, but how do we relate to the success of the Greens in this period.

On the question of the Greens, John makes a range of good points:

We are rivals in a limited way only in the sense that we are competing for similar constituencies. But then, I would argue that precisely because of this—because we do agree on some fundamental things—and all the more so with the Greens left, that we should see them as potential allies. They aren’t going to go away. They are on a roll and it is pointless to speculate that if they get into government they will automatically be “exposed” and people will turn to us. It hasn’t happened in Tasmania, and the Greens have been there for a long time.

I believe John is correct in his argument that we must have a creative engagement with the Greens. We do share similar policies on a range of issues, and it is difficult (in a purely parliamentary sense)

to see much difference in our political positions, particularly with the left Greens.

Where we fundamentally differ from the Greens is our strategy, and on this we have to be completely clear. The Greens (while individual members may be activists, and in some cases very good activists) have a parliamentary strategy. They believe that they can ameliorate the ills of society by having enough representatives elected to parliament to win government (or even to hold the balance of power, as articulated in their Victorian campaign). Socialist Alliance on the other hand has a socialist vision, which rests on the extra-parliamentary strength of working people. In the Victorian election, our election leaflet summarised it this way:

Socialist Alliance is an anti-capitalist party. We stand for socialism — democratic ownership and management of the social wealth. We believe that a society based on satisfying human need can be created, but only by taking power from the elites who now rule.

We stand for a society run by and for working people, both here, but also internationally. We believe that socialism will be won by the power of the masses on the streets and in the workplaces. We seek election to parliament not to “represent” the movements, but to help build them, resource them and help them win.

A better world is possible. Together we can build it.

No doctrinal complication, or sharp differentiation between reform and revolution here — just a simple statement in favour of socialism and workers’ power.

Nevertheless as John points out, we must form united fronts in action with the Greens where possible, to win their better elements (and their supporters) to socialist solutions. Certainly this process has begun. We have organised some anti-war actions with Greens candidates. We continue to seek their collaboration in building local and citywide actions against war, for refugee rights and so forth. But we could certainly do more.

And this is one place where I disagree with John. We are, in a sense, in competition with the Greens — for members. John makes a correct point in dismissing those who claim that the Greens are not activists. Our challenge is to make Socialist

Alliance more activist — for if it’s one area that we are in sharp competition with the Greens, it’s members. And unless we do all we can to give Socialist Alliance a real life between elections, we will lose members — and activists at that — to the Greens. But how do we do it?

A good first step toward building the Alliance from the organisation that we have, to the organisation that we want, would be for us all to embrace it. As the DSP and others have suggested, those of us who are building other (socialist) organisations should cease to do so, and simply build the Alliance. Rather than simply a “reorganisation of the deckchairs” as John pessimistically puts it, this would release some real resources for the Alliance to build a real organisation. How many hundreds of Alliance members are there already that we don’t have the resources to organise? How many extra branches could we pioneer, if we were to combine our (otherwise limited) resources around a project that we all admit is central?

John’s closing remarks bear out this contradiction all the more:

I’d argue that we need to develop ongoing activity in the electorates where we have branches. A follow-up letterboxing expedition to say thank you, as the bare minimum, but also longer-term campaigns on a variety of “levels” of issues, even further letterboxing of Socialist Alliance material. We also need a “war chest” so that we aren’t always caught on the hop, reacting with scant resources whenever a maggot-headed politician such as Steve Bracks decides to call an election. Basically, it’s about implanting ourselves in the working class in local areas, but with a national spread. We have to build real links with the working class communities if we are to succeed.

John’s recipe for the growth and consolidation of Socialist Alliance is absolutely correct. One could probably add to this list our trade union solidarity work, the distribution of an Alliance newspaper and the building of regular actions and public meetings. But none of this will become a reality if we don’t admit collectively that this is the way forward for the socialist movement as a whole, set our differences aside for a time and set down to achieving it. ■

Ideas for a social justice and social well-being policy

By Melinda Smith (Sydney Central Branch)

In the Socialist Alliance we clearly need to address the issues of law and order, as the policies of the major parties are so unjust. However, we need to avoid a reactive style of policy development. This is exactly what the major parties do. They react to current circumstances, to so-called public opinion, led by a small number of powerful media personalities, and to opinion polls. While we do need to state our opposition to new laws, which add to the discrimination against the poor and marginalised and restrict civil liberties, we need to go much further. We need to claim clearly our position on social justice. To only discuss law and order is to react. To talk only of crime prevention is to react negatively.

There are three main areas we should consider when discussing social justice and social well-being. The first is the area of social, community and family life generally, issues of poverty, alienation and oppression. The second is to understand that crime is a social concept and has a social definition. This being so we must discuss how we in the Socialist Alliance define crime. The third area we must plan is our response when people commit a crime. We will need to consider our underpinning philosophy and the practical strategies we consider acceptable.

There has been a considerable amount of research into the underlying causes of so-called criminality. (A useful place for some basic information in this area is the Beyond Bars Alliance. All Socialist Alliance members should consider joining BBA.) What we know is that people in prison predominantly tend to have come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, to have struggled at school, to have struggled to become or remain in employment, to have had contact with the Department of Community Services as a child at risk and a range of factors which when put together build a picture of someone who struggles to belong to feel a part of society. This says something both about the needs of that person but also of society.

There are many areas of social policy relating to social justice and social well-being. These include poverty, unemployment, housing, class, gender, etc etc. All of these areas are part of social well-being, which leads to social justice. That is, disadvantage can lead to an increase in anti-social/criminal behaviour. Rather than discussing crime prevention

we would be more just to discuss social, community, family and personal well-being. This is also often known as social capital and there has been some interesting work done in this area by Eva Cox, among others.

One area that I would like to raise is that of parenting. I raise this, not because it is the only issue, but because I want to put forward some points on this particular issue. We need to consider socialist policy in relation to parenting. The idea that individual parents have “ownership”, sole responsibility and rights over their children needs to be reflected on. While it is easy to plan to provide greater levels of assistance to parents, we need to consider whether that assistance would be provided only on a voluntary basis (that is only to families who ask for help) or on the basis of need (of families and of children in particular), even when parents may not be asking for this assistance. If we were to consider the latter path we would need to think very carefully about who sets such an agenda and how to avoid further disadvantaging the disadvantaged. In short we need to avoid any repetition of the “stolen generations”. However, we need also to ensure that issues of “culture” or “individual choice” do not override human rights.

Crime is a social concept and has a social definition. We order society by setting rules. Behaviour that breaks those rules is criminal behaviour. Crime or criminal behaviour has a social definition—attracts societal disapproval. The way that society currently deals with this is to sanction or punish people who engage in these behaviours. From a socialist perspective I hope we can easily agree that we need rules to help society and communities exist. The majority of our current laws probably do not need urgent revision, however some will.

The really important factor to consider is the philosophical and political stand that underpins law-making. We should consider: are we making laws or rules to ensure the smooth running of society and the protection of people within society as much as possible? Are rules in place to protect the powerful, the weak or the majority? Are rules designed to assist people to follow them or to punish them for breaking them? Do we have any other agendas running when we make rules? If we have these kinds of discussions and debates and have a clear picture of our goals in rule-making we

may find that individual rule-making is less contentious.

However fantastic and satisfying life in a socialist society is there will still be some rule-breaking and therefore some rule-breakers, currently known as criminals. What do we do about this? How do we respond when someone commits a crime/ breaks the rules?

I strongly suggest that we move away from a punishment-based response to a treatment/rehabilitative-based response. I suspect that we can easily find broad agreement here, but some other, more difficult questions need to be discussed. Do we ever prevent people from freely moving about in society (lock them up)? Do we ever mandate

treatment? What do we do when people find the treatment or rehabilitation aversive or punishing? We need to have some sense of what will be acceptable and how much we need to change our current justice system.

I am suggesting two things. (1) that the Socialist Alliance develop a social justice and social well-being policy that considers why crime may occur in the first place, what constitutes crime and what should be done when crime occurs. (2) that we take time to consider these matters in some depth and develop some clear platforms, philosophical and political viewpoints on which to base such a policy. I hope this generates some further discussion. ■

Input into the Socialist Alliance debate from a non-aligned member

By Mitch Bond (Marrickville Branch)

The printed discourse espoused by both the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) and Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) was ripe with Marxists, Leninists and Trotsky interpretations used to advance (support) their case. Yeah, which is fair enough, for it initially “worked for me”. I thought one side had verity but only until the following week, when the other side would have a more pertinent “red” maxim.

My favourite “not”: “IF THIS IS *TRUE*, THEN IT MUST FOLLOW...”

What the fuck?

(You can apply a reverse angle of meaning to just about any statement! Now whether the “*truth*” comes out of the alteration? Yeah, wasn’t the word “*truth*” invented by the ancient Greeks for their “right of conquest”? E.g. how often does the teratoid “Bush” use the word Truth?)

Enough, back to the palaver and as result of the elucidations of the parties.

One week I would be pro-ISO and up yours “pragmatic DSP” until my next reading when it would be pro-DSP and up yours “dogmatic ISO”.

An old African saying I heard recently: “*Until lions can write, history will always be written by the hunter*”.

That is why we are here!

My thinking: Socialism is exposing the venal politicians and/or politics of our present governments.

Socialism is proselytizing the workers for a change of understanding, to a just, honest, equitable and sustainable environment.

We are the party (electoral front) for the “rights” of the oppressed.

We (Socialist Alliance) are an organized vanguard for the above.

(Off with the trumpet-call)

We are at crossroads of Socialist Alliance’s history because the debate has imploded and is not just about “reformism versus revolution”. It includes much more.

It is about competition, about past and present antagonisms and perceived political stances.

Differences that the capitalist use to divide the workers.

The only certainties in the ruckus are that the DSP and ISO are revolutionary parties!

The next stage is where it gets tricky.

For it is written “True Socialism cannot be achieved through parliamentary means”.

Yes, comrades, I too have read some of the literature.

But I disagree by saying that reformism is the only chance we have or that reform is *as good as it gets* at this particular point of time, in our existence!

I would state the “Whitlam years” as proof that “reformism” does obtain some changes to benefit the working class. Although granted that “as-good-as-it-gets” is not real special or just what the elite lets us have, the time is ripe to demand the same.

This is why I joined the Socialist Alliance because it was a united Socialist Party intent on reshaping today’s Government and Society.

As to whether the Socialist Alliance should adopt a revolutionary stance?

If I am to be frank I cannot see a revolution happening even in my lifetime, another 45 years will do me (see I am optimistic, nicely thank you).

Let's try to put this revolution thinking into perspective from a "frank's" point of view.

I have now been in Socialist Alliance for approximately 18 months although only active for the last 12 months. In that last year I have been involved in demos, marches, picketing, symposiums, workshops, conferences, community fairs, elections, working bees, parties, BBQs, rallies, film nights, endless visits to pubs and coffee houses, various political meetings i.e. refugees to local peace groups and faction party nights, handing out leaflets at the local station and in our local town, to trying convert friends and neighbours, sticking up posters and a congress etc, for Socialist Alliance and its affiliates!

A fairly intensive indoctrination with the likelihood of becoming a convert, you would think?

No, all I can purport is being better educated to the concepts of why we are in such a mess, humanitarian-wise. In fact I am more aware of the limitations that we have to front if we are to achieve justice!

Yeah, the conundrum of the Reformists: "We know that the only clear way forward is to alter the present system by reforming the old system to begin anew?"

It is not as if I am not open to a truly socialistic society. I like to think of my mind as pliable as clay, heck I thought the reason the boats the refugees travelled in, were classified as S.I.E.V. was because they leaked like the proverbial "hole in the bucket" not because it was an acronym!

The major reason I consider myself to be a reformist not a revolutionary is because I am a follower not leader and no such place exists or one that I would be prepared to swap.

Aside...

Why won't the average Australian worker support Socialist politics? Perhaps the majority of Australian workers have not yet hit their collective Econo- or Socio- or Environo- "rock bottom" (to borrow a 12-step fellowship analogy). When this occurs, a total transformation of their political awareness stirs and awakens! Or else they just continue being. Or the "word" is still a "dirty word" and we need to work on how to friendlyfy (my word) it.

Back to the discourse...

If Reform (my thinking) is the logical short- to medium-term policy of access for the Socialist Alliance, then how do we safeguard our principles so that Socialist Alliance parliamentarians are not brainwashed or corrupted?

Yeah, I think we have to have "open discussions" (where have I heard that before!) on ways of safeguarding our representatives so as they don't become fodder for ravenous tyrants.

I know of only two means that have been advertised:

A wage limited to the average workers wage (as viewed but window dressing only);

No conscience vote—thus limiting our representatives to the party's (or front's) policy.

I wonder if these two methods are enough or do we need to have more checks and are there more?

My feelings on the pros of the DSP coming on board to become an internal tendency and, as far as I can fathom, staying a revolutionary tendency of the Socialist Alliance:

(Yeah, and the ISO for that matter. They can both become revolutionary segments of the Socialist Alliance. Fuck, they can become the "catch as catch can" teams of the left of the left and really get stuck into each other or just "gambol" about?)

1. Their organizational ability (they sure now how to conduct a congress);

2. The financial side (their ability to meet the basics);

3. Their passion (yeah, very vocal with a lot of fist pumping in demos);

4. Their established infrastructure (the Resistant [to updating] Centres. The *Green Left* paper.)

5. With their involvement the Socialist Alliance becomes a party. A party, involved with change, not just at the peripheries and not just for the elections. It does not matter that there is always an election (hopefully) coming up. No, I was not very impressed when I found out there was a difference, between a party and a Electoral United Front as purported by some.

The cons:

The DSP and Dick (who can adopt a "not let the facts get in the way of a good story" position) have some sinister plans for the Socialist Alliance!

Perhaps, their aim is that "Socialist politics" are finally given some "cred" (or weight) in today's society?

Or it could be, the proverbial finger to some sections of society for all of those years of leaving "lefty" out in the boonies?

I have to say the exuberance exhibited by the ISO and DSP members is contagious which in turn feeds my enthusiasm for our Socialist Alliance.

Oh yeah, the DSP should not use a muscle term “force to gain control” etc in their Vision Statement for the whole of Socialist Alliance. (It may sound absurd, but you have to pose as if you are compliant, thus all you have in mind is the “from above” thinking or the greater good at this stage of Socialist Alliance’s life.) The reformist sections of the Socialist Alliance are not ready just yet!

Before I finish I will congratulate the boys from the ISO who turned the “perceived ultimatum”

from the DSP and virtually blackmailed the rest of Socialist Alliance. It was as if you guys did not like how the others were playing, got the sulks and threatened to take the ball (but was it the ISO’s to take?) and off home!

Perhaps the answer to the stoush doesn’t lie in the words of the protagonists (actors) but in the Socialist Alliance as a whole, like at the annual conference in May. Be there!

Comrade (I still have a hard time using that term) Mitch ■

Israel/Palestine discussion

By Janet Burstall (Workers’ Liberty)

The issue of Israel/Palestine has been flagged for discussion at the May Conference. Here are three positions provided as discussion starters. We are open to discussions to develop a policy position to put to the May Conference.

Workers’ Liberty Proposal

For a socialist federation of the Middle East, with the right to self-determination for all nationalities. A resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict, and a socialist unity of the Israeli and Arab working classes, must be based on consistent democracy, recognising the right to self-determination of both Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab nations.

Adapted from Jews for a Just Peace

Peace will only prevail with the establishment of a secure and viable Palestinian state together with Palestinian acceptance of an Israeli state within recognised and secure borders.

This requires mutual respect and understanding, which will necessitate changes to both peoples’ educational, cultural, religious and media institutions.

In solidarity with the Palestinian’s struggle for independence and with the peace movement in Israel we support the following:

- Withdrawal of the Israeli army from territories occupied in 1967.
- The removal of Israeli settlements from the occupied territories. These settlements are recognised internationally as a major obstacle to peace.
- The end of both state-sanctioned violence and of terrorism against civilians for achieving political goals.

- An immediate resumption of negotiations aimed at the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel based on the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

- A just resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem that takes into account the needs and aspirations of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. This should respect the special relationship between the state of Israel and the Jewish people while acknowledging Israel’s share of responsibility for the plight of Palestinian refugees.

Jews for a Just Peace original statement

Peace will only prevail with the establishment of a secure and viable Palestinian state together with Palestinian acceptance of an Israeli state within recognised and secure borders.

This requires mutual respect and understanding, which will necessitate changes to both peoples’ educational, cultural, religious and media institutions. In solidarity with the peace movement in Israel we support the following.

- The end of both state-sanctioned violence and of terrorism against civilians for achieving political goals.
- The immediate establishment of an international peacekeeping force to end the cycle of violence.
- An immediate resumption of negotiations aimed at the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel based on the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.
- Withdrawal of the Israeli army from territories occupied in 1967.

- A just resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem that takes into account the needs and aspirations of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. This should respect the special relationship

between the state of Israel and the Jewish people while acknowledging Israel's share of responsibility for the plight of Palestinian refugees.



Preferences policy in the Cunningham by-election and the NSW election

Do not build illusions in the Democrats—bury their corpse

By Riki Lane (Workers' Liberty)

This is a reply to the article in Socialist Alliance *Discussion Bulletin* Volume 2 Number 7: "The Socialist Alliance campaign: a reply to Riki Lane by Chris Pickering and Chris Williams (Illawarra branch)". (Chris and Chris are hereafter referred to as "the comrades"). This article is hastily written, unfortunately. It does not pretend to be a comprehensive look at the issues around the class nature of the ALP, union affiliation etc. I am sure there will be more debates on that. I do not look at issues around preferencing the Greens in detail, but focus on the Democrats.

Socialist Alliance's objectives

Socialist Alliance preferencing policy for elections is determined in the context of the overall purpose of the Socialist Alliance project. What are Socialist Alliance's central objectives? I see them as:

1. Helping to create the grounds for a mass class struggle workers' party that can take up the issues of all the oppressed and exploited;
2. Getting the revolutionary left to work coherently together so that we can have more effect on the working class;
3. Working through the major political issues of our day—international war and capitalist crisis, how to relate to the existing labour and social movements.

In programmatic terms, there are substantial differences in Socialist Alliance in attitude to Stalinism, to imperialism and to national/communal struggles. These have some impact on campaigns such as those against the current war, and more on other wars like those in East Timor, Kosova and Israel/Palestine.

However, for most of our work it is the question of how to relate to the existing labour movement that is the big one. Behind the disagreements over the ALP and unions-affiliation, the class nature of the ALP, the relative importance of union work—like disagreements about how to relate to the

consciousness and existing organizations of the mass of non-revolutionary workers.

I would like to clear up some misconceptions by the comrades or by me in my prior article. I don't argue that Illawarra Socialist Alliance ignores workers' concerns, that it is only composed of DSP members or that only DSP members supported preferencing the Democrats. I agree that there was no real possibility of suspending the Socialist Alliance campaign in support of the Wilson one—but would argue that if that had been possible, Socialist Alliance should have very seriously considered doing so. I found the comrades extensive description of the background to the by-election interesting and useful.

The comrades put forward a list of considerations for determining preferences, that includes looking at an organization's:

- Program/platform/policies;
- What they say they would do;
- What they actually have done in the past;
- How they actually respond to the major political issues of the day;
- The characteristic politics and social class/strata of the leadership;
- The characteristic politics and social class/strata of the membership;
- The major sources of financial support;
- The major political issues impinging upon mass consciousness;
- The general political mood or mass sentiment; and, most importantly,
- What concrete issues need to be addressed for a socialist candidate to get a hearing from the working class and other oppressed layers.

The comrades add:

This constellation of factors is also subject to something that sounds unscientific but is a very real political factor—the intangible element of being able to get the political "feel" for what is happening...All these facets make up the overall class-based analysis...

Tactics and principles

It is quite clear from this list that the class base of any party is just one factor amongst many for the comrades, so we can advocate a vote for any capitalist party if the other factors are strong enough. For me, the reason we can sometimes support Green candidates is that they are neither clearly a bosses' or a workers' party, in social base or in politics. Their policies on working class issues are usually excellent and they have attracted many unionists as members and supporters. Their membership is quite variable, as are their politics. In Queensland, where they have preferred the Liberals, their relationship to the working class is quite different to in NSW or in Victoria.

The comrades argue that I raise a tactical question to one of principle by wanting to rule out preferencing the Democrats before the ALP.

I think there are questions of principle here, not just tactics. It comes down to a different assessment of the class nature of the contending parties. The continuing union links and its position in the consciousness of many workers makes the ALP different from the Democrats, and from the Greens. Obviously, that is brought into focus when unions are breaking, episodically, from the ALP.

To pose it sharply, if as the comrades say, the "ALP and the Liberals represent the two wings of the neo-liberal assault", if the ALP is just another outright capitalist party, why should we preference the ALP before the Liberals? The CPA-ML actually argued in the 1977 elections that a Liberal government would be better than a Labor one, because Whitlam was too pro-Soviet. If the ALP is just like the US Democratic Party, would not that mean that socialists in the US should sometimes support the US Democrats, as the lesser evil? That road has led many a US socialist to political extinction, most notably Max Shactman.

In practice, the comrades and the DSP do treat Labor differently to the Liberals. They recognise that it has a different relationship to the working class. However, an analysis that rejects Labor's "dual nature" (pro-capitalist leaders and policies, working class base) opens the way to the mess that many parties from the Stalinist tradition have made—supporting one ruling class party or the other as the lesser evil. Supporting the Democrats, however critically, is a step down that road.

I see this as a crunch issue. Any support to the Democrats is deadly for a working class orientation.

While I agree that Socialist Alliance branches need to have some flexibility in relating to local conditions, that needs to be a tactical application of agreed principles. At Socialist Alliance's founding conference Workers' Liberty moved a set of

principles for supporting other candidates (see appendix), but this was rejected in favour of a general position of preferencing Greens before ALP, with no mention of the Democrats.

Wilson vs. Ogden

The question of Greens before Wilson and Democrats before ALP are related, but different. In both, the comrades place concerns for the candidates' policies and the "mood" of the electorate ahead of the social base of their parties.

While there is clearly a "crossover" between unionists and the Greens, the Greens have no organised relationship to the unions, nor any explicit orientation against capitalism or towards the working class. Wilson represented, however inadequately, a break from the ALP in the organised union heartland.

I see the choice between Wilson and the Greens as a tactical one, appropriately to be decided by the local branch. I would have liked to see more evidence that Ogden takes a pro-union stance before backing him. The fact that he is an active unionist is important here. Perhaps the Illawarra comrades made the right choice.

However, think about this: what would the impact on labour movement politics have been if Wilson were elected not Ogden? Instead of a huge boost for the Greens, there would have been an open breach in the organised labour movement. That could have given a big spur towards developing a serious alternative workers' party. Instead of the realistic electoral alternative to the ALP being the Greens, it would have been independent union candidates.

The Democrats

The Democrats "represent a clear class-based petty-bourgeois politics" and are responsible for foisting the GST and Reith's anti-union laws on the working class, as the comrades point out. However, they argue that both Wilson and Ogden preferred Democrats before ALP and we would have been out of step with those breaking from the ALP if we had acted differently. "The pressure was on to put Labor last or as low as possible."

I think this is simultaneously the comrades' strongest and weakest point. That many workers were so pissed off with the ALP that they put them below the Democrats is important. They may even have put Labor last—after One Nation and the CEC. How should Socialist Alliance respond to that pressure? We obviously had to relate to their anger, which we did by preferencing Greens and Wilson. However, Socialist Alliance argued for them not to be so pissed off that they put right-wingers before

the ALP. We could have made a clear argument about class politics by not recommending the Democrats as a better alternative. Instead, we advocated a vote for a boss's party showing its left face, ahead of a party with organisational links to the unions and a continuing presence in workers' consciousness.

And what about the over 30 per cent who still voted ALP? Don't we have a responsibility to relate to them, as well as to those who made the break? After all, Ogden could not have been elected without the vast majority of Liberal and right wing preferences. We should not just dismiss those who stayed with Labor as "rusted-on" and therefore conservative. Despite everything that Labor had done to them, many workers still saw it as their party.

The comrades pose a scenario where "the Democrats had control of the Senate and were continually forcing ALP reactionary bills to be amended or ameliorated"—would we still preference Labor because it "supposedly represents the working class in some round about manner?"

This is truly terrible—and dangerous—politics from a socialist point of view. Apart from ignoring the real world—Labor governments can almost always get the Liberals to back their reactionary legislation—it confines us completely to the terrain of bourgeois politics. With a reactionary Labor government, I would argue that a socialist focus is on getting mass action to stop the laws, unions to fight in the ALP and then break with it on a political basis, getting left ALPers to cross the floor or quit, etc.

It is bad enough when people point to the Democrats, as moderating the excesses of the Liberals and that is why we need to vote for them. For socialists to advocate the Democrats as a progressive brake on Labor is ridiculous. You can just about make out that case for the Greens, but the Democrats?

The comrades argue that our job is "to break people's illusions in Labor, not reinforce them". I generally agree, but do we want to create illusions in the Democrats instead? Also, it is not just a question of illusions—workers look to ALP as their realistic governmental alternative. The Greens are now also starting to be seen as a serious balance of power broker, with a more extensive reformist agenda.

The ALP

The comrades also argue that "...the ALP is a reactionary pillar of stable capitalist politics, and can be nothing but a never-ending political dead-

end for those genuine working class militants who are trapped within its suffocating embrace."

It is certainly true that individual activity in the ALP is stultifying and saps class consciousness, but Labor is not dead for the purposes of pursuing working-class politics. Political conflicts are hard to spark in the Labor party, but have enormous effects on workers' politics when they get going. We are now seeing the strongest expressions of principled and public dissent (against the war) from within the ALP than since the accord was enforced.

I do not see that the comrades' framework deals effectively with the attitude of class struggle union leaderships (CFMEU, TCFUA etc) in the last Victorian election. Those leaderships would not call for a vote for Socialist Alliance because we did not preference ALP second. Some of the very best union leaderships in Australia saw it as vital to have an ALP government rather than an anti-union Liberal one.

To dismiss this as just illusions is a mistake—there is a real material difference. Their confidence in the Bracks government may be misplaced—and now it does not have the excuse of a hostile upper house. However, they can point to its criticism of the Cole Royal Commission and its refusal to accept \$90 million of Federal money for the MCG as a union-bashing bribe. The CFMEU could rightly argue this material support from the ALP is much more significant than what Socialist Alliance can provide

The difference isn't that large or clear in NSW and we have to continue arguing for unions to support independent working class candidates and to put their faith in mass action, not ALP deals.

Unions and politics

Finally, the comrades argue that: workers often participate in movements outside of organised working class structures; that campaigns are strongly connected to the class struggle; that socialism must "go beyond direct economic and point of production issues"; and that I pose a "false dichotomy—we must mainly work in the unions and not in the movements and campaigns".

I plead guilty to often bending the stick on the importance of union work. Workers' Liberty sometimes gets called "workerist", because we are always banging on about unions and a working class orientation. In this we are trying to act as a corrective for an endemic tendency of the far left to underplay the importance of work in unions in favour of students, campaigns, etc, where the short term possibilities of recruitment are much better.

I see the lack of a consistent, ongoing orientation in unions as our biggest weakness.

Possibly, Marx's most important contribution to socialism was to orient it to the working class and its unions. Lasalle, Proudhon, *et al* were openly hostile to union organising.

For Marxists, getting workers organised around politics at the point of production is central. I agree with the comrades that it is vital for unions to go beyond economism, to take up political issues, and to organise their own political representation. However, it is also vital for campaigns to have the labour movement at their core, or liberal/populist ideas and popular front methods can easily dominate them.

The NSW election

The war is a huge item in people's minds and voting intentions in NSW. The ALP is playing catch up to the anti-war movement, while Carr is dead quiet. The Democrats have on a left face on the Iraq war, and hope to resuscitate themselves from their death agony. Does anyone doubt that the ALP throwing itself solidly behind the antiwar movement would be a thousand times more important than the Democrats? Precisely because of the ALP's influence in the unions and the working class.

The ALP has "war is OK if the UN says so position". This is, barely, avoiding a major left-right split. Once war comes, the pressure will be on. If Crean backs a UN sponsored war, the left and some of the unions will go wild. If he does not back a US-only war, the right and some other unions will kick up. Either way, it is turbulent times for the ALP. The fight there will strongly affect other developments in the broader labour movement.

The Democrats beef up their anti-war credentials in public, but finesse the question in private. If you look at their web-site, they avoid taking an attitude on a UN-supported war, but imply that it might change their attitude. They base their opposition largely on the damage to Australia's "National Interest".

What is Socialist Alliance's best approach in this situation?

The open letter to the ALP and ones to individual candidates [decided by the February 25 hook-up of the National Conveners] are good initiatives. We need to build the pressure on them to come out against a UN-sponsored war and to actively support and build the movement against the war. We have to act to widen the split in the ALP and unions. Giving preferences to the Democrats will not help us do that.

If we put Democrats before ALP, are we not "building illusions" in the Democrats as a reliable ally of working people? If our preferences have any

effect after the Greens, would not helping elect a Democrat instead of an ALPer to the Upper House just be breathing life into a corpse that Socialist Alliance would like to see buried? Sure, we want Labor's reformism (in both old and new variants) to disappear as well, but there is a real chance of ridding the political landscape of the Democrats as any serious force.

Appendix: Workers' Liberty Proposal on preferences at founding conference

Vote 1 Socialist Alliance.

Second preferences to the ALP with exceptions as follows.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Oppose any de-registration proceedings against any trade union or any other anti-union action taken by a Labor government.

Last preferences go to One Nation, or any other far-right or fascist candidates. Second (or subsequent) last preferences go to the Coalition. ■

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE RESOLUTIONS

Solidarity with Venezuela—Statement by the Socialist Alliance

[Unanimously adopted by the January 31, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]

In April of 2002 a coalition of big business and elements of the Venezuelan military, with the help of the United States, staged a military coup against the popularly elected government of Hugo Chávez. The coup failed after mass popular demonstrations forced the military to return Chávez to office.

Since then big business has increased its attacks and confrontations with the Chávez government. The US has continued to support a campaign of destabilisation orchestrated by ex-military officers, responsible for the failed April coup and the multimillionaire managers of the oil industry which is a mainstay of Venezuelan economy.

This right wing coalition has organised protests and since December last year it has staged a lockout of workers which has caused massive economic chaos in the country.

The workers and the popular movement in Venezuela have fought back to defend their constitution and their elected government.

The future of the political situation in Venezuela is not only a concern for the majority of the workers and unemployed and underemployed of Venezuelan society but for the people of Latin America and the rest of the world.

Like Chile 1973 the military and big business interests, in conjunction with U.S imperialism, are trying to destabilise a popularly elected government. The only crime of the Chávez government like Allende in Chile has been that he has implemented social reforms that have alleviated the plight of the most oppressed classes in Venezuela and has introduced policies that have begun to redistribute the national wealth away from big business to the poor.

Throughout Latin America in recent elections the people have voted in governments that are willing to look at more socially progressive reforms and that confront the power and wealth of big business and U.S economic interests.

The workers and popular movements in the continent have been re-invigorated. They have elected progressive governments in Ecuador and Brazil and continue to organise mass protests in Argentina, Bolivia and El Salvador to resist the impact of the policies being pushed by the international financial institutions and U.S imperialism, including its criminal 40-year-long blockade of Cuba.

The Socialist Alliance condemns the rightwing campaign to oust President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and calls on the left and progressive movement in Australia to show their solidarity with the people of Venezuela who support the government of Chávez.

This has particular significance as the US (backed by the Australian government) prepares for war on Iraq to protect its access to oil in the Middle East. Venezuela is the world's fifth largest exporter of oil and is a major supplier to the US.

The Socialist Alliance supports the slogan coined by the workers movement of Argentina "*Que se vayan todos*" (They all must go). All the exploiters and politicians who are putting the interests of big business and the International Financial Institutions ahead of those of the majority of the people of Latin America.

Support the popular and workers struggle in Venezuela!

No U.S interference in the affairs of Latin America!

No to neo-liberal policies of privatization! ■

Socialist Alliance-initiated statement against the impending war on Iraq

For action to stop this unjust war!

[Unanimously adopted by the January 31, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]

The Australian government has sent troops to support a US-led war against Iraq.

Whether or not it is sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council, this war will be an unjust war—not a war against terrorism and weapons of

mass destruction but a war for oil and for control of the Middle East.

It will not reduce the threat of terrorism, but make it worse.

It will produce unimaginable suffering for the people of Iraq, already the victims of a 10-year-

long blockade that has claimed over half a million victims.

There will be death and suffering also for the ordinary soldiers in the invading armies—just as the 1991 Gulf War saw thousands of troops poisoned by depleted uranium weapons.

And it will not liberate the peoples of Iraq from dictatorship, but impose another Saddam Hussein—or worse.

The majority of the Australian people understand this: only six per cent support the Bush-Blair-Howard crusade to invade Iraq without Security Council backing.

In other countries support is even less. Clearly, if the peoples of Australia and the world were free to decide on war there would be no attack on Iraq.

Therefore we, the undersigned, committed to preventing or stopping this war on Iraq:

- Call on all Australian people to commit themselves to building the broadest possible movement against the threatened war on Iraq;
- Express our solidarity with Australia's Middle Eastern, Muslim and Arabic-speaking communities, who have been the target of cowardly and brutal racist attacks;
- Call on all Australians to participate in protest actions and demonstrations against a war on Iraq, beginning with the February 14-16 international days of action;
- Pledge to support those unions that refuse to handle any military equipment and material that might be used in a war on Iraq; and
- Call on all unions and trades and labour councils and the ACTU to organise a national day of protest and rallies supported with stop-work and other industrial action aimed at halting war with Iraq. ■

Model motion for trade unions on action against war on Iraq

[Unanimously adopted by the January 31, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]

This meeting of [details of union body]:

1. Believes that there is no justification for the war on Iraq that is about to be unleashed by the US government. This war will be an unjust war—not a war against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction but a war for oil and for control of the Middle East. Saddam Hussein is a brutal dictator, but it up to the Iraqi people, not Washington, to get rid of him. We condemn the Howard government for its support for Bush's drive to war.

2. Notes that trade unions have played a crucial historical role in building opposition to unjust and illegal wars, for example in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. We congratulate the train drivers in Scotland who refused to transport war materials for the British army in Iraq and the growing number of US labour councils and unions that have come out against the war.

3. Therefore calls on our union to:

- to oppose military preparations for war and demand the immediate withdrawal of all Australian armed forces from the Gulf;
- actively participate in the anti-war demonstrations, including emergency actions called to respond to the beginning of war on Iraq;
- place industrial bans on any work associated with the war effort against Iraq;
- hold meetings with other unions, relevant trades and labour councils and the ACTU to develop an ongoing campaign of industrial action against the war;
- urge the Labor Party to unequivocally oppose the war;
- actively build the anti-war movement by holding delegate and workplace meetings and by endorsing, publicising and providing financial support to the [name of relevant anti-war organisation]. ■

Report on the Socialist Alliance web site

By Justin Randell (Marrickville Branch) and Sean Vickery (Brisbane District).

[Unanimously adopted by the January 31, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]

The aims of the proposals in this report are:

1. To produce a set of guidelines for branches for what should be put on the website.

2. To increase the volume of traffic through the site to make it a better outreach tool for the Alliance.

3. To increase the functionality of the website, to make it a more powerful organizational tool.

4. To give local branches some ownership of the website, to make content on the website pertinent to local branch members, and to improve its local appeal.

Guidelines for web content

1. The website should be used as a front-line means of advertising local Socialist Alliance event.

2. It is proposed that the Socialist Alliance adopts a “broad church” approach to listing other groups’ events on our site. That is, even if we don’t agree with every position that a group puts forward, if they are generally progressive then it is okay to list their events. Where branches are uncertain about an organisation/event, they should consult with the National Conveners before listing them on the web.

Profile and links

It is proposed:

1. That progressive organisations be approached to include links to the Socialist Alliance site on their websites.

2. That the Socialist Alliance website develop a links page with a “broad church” approach to including links. To avoid confusion, a disclaimer will be included on this page indicating that the Socialist Alliance does not necessarily share all the views of the organisations/websites listed.

3. That branches undertake to approach progressive organisations/campaigns about including their events in the local calendar page.

4. That an update message be sent to relevant email lists to advertise the site on a regular basis.

Local branch content and involvement

1. That persons be delegated by branches (“website delegates”), and possibly other elected bodies such as state committees, campaigning and other committees, to be responsible for contributing information about local events to the national website. This information would form part of the local events pages of the website.

2. Where the delegated person is technically confident, the person should directly upload their

branch’s local content to the website. The first priority for local content should be specific Socialist Alliance events. The national website team would continue to be able to remove, edit or add content in local branch areas as appropriate. It is anticipated that such intervention would be rare, and that it would be for technical reasons more often than for political ones.

3. That the necessary technical steps be undertaken to allow the partitioning of the Socialist Alliance website so that the branches can access areas relevant to them and upload local content directly, while the national office retains the ability to moderate content for the whole site.

4. Where branches have the resources and technical skill, they are encouraged to develop web pages beyond “calendar of events” pages, which would be maintained locally. In presenting this content, it will be vitally important to maintain a consistent look and feel for the website as a whole. The national website team makes itself available to the website delegates on an ongoing basis to facilitate this. Additionally, the national website team will develop templates for local pages, instructions for uploading, and will be available to help with any related technical questions for local branches.

National coordination

1. The website team could get a new email address, website@socialist-alliance.org. A feedback form will be added at the bottom of each page on the website, with feedback going to the website team, and, after further development of this facility, to the local website delegate when appropriate. The contact point for Socialist Alliance generally ne@socialist-alliance.org would be split from the contact point for the website team, facilitating the division of correspondence into political/administrative and website.

2. If this proposal is adopted, the NE appoints Justin Randell and Sean Vickery to oversee its implementation, in consultation with the national conveners. ■

Resolution on anti-war work

[Unanimously adopted by the February 21, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]

This meeting of the Socialist Alliance National Executive;

In the light of the unprecedented February 14-16 protests and the results of the intervention of the various branches of Socialist Alliance in them;

Resolves:

1. That, in order to strengthen a clear left pole of unconditional opposition to the impending war on Iraq, urgently to recommend to all branches/districts that they organize Socialist Alliance anti-war work caucuses;

2. That these caucuses should have as their aims:

- To help draw together (and establish a broader caucus of) all forces that are unconditionally opposed to the war;
- To develop the growth of the anti-war movement in the trade union movement;
- To draw migrant communities into more direct participation in the anti-war movement;
- To ensure that local Socialist Alliance branch relate to and intervene in local community anti-war campaigning by taking their own initiatives in the

area, relating to local anti-war groups or initiating them, building anti-war activities and networks in their area;

- To hold public meetings in Socialist Alliance's own name as well participating in more broadly sponsored events; and

- To defend and extend the democratic functioning of anti-war movement committees and groups against attempts to bureaucratize these and reduce their accountability.

3. That where broader caucuses based on unconditional opposition to the war already exist and the tasks described above are already being carried out through them that specific Socialist Alliance caucuses meet only as needed to help promote the functioning of these broader formations. ■

National Conference draft agenda

[Unanimously adopted by the February 21, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]

- That the following draft agenda be adopted in principle as covering the issues (including documents) to be treated at the Second National Conference;

- That the Conference be held at the Flemington Community Centre and another venue be sought for the Saturday night public meeting;

That the final line-up of speakers for the public meeting be decided later when all possibilities are known, but that overseas guests at the very least be given featured greetings opportunities.

Draft agenda, Second National Conference, Friday May 9 to Sunday May 11

(Sessions needing document or documents are marked by #)

Friday evening

Welcome and reception by Workers First

Saturday

9-1 Balance sheet and perspectives #

1-2 Lunch

2-3.30 Platform proposals #

3.30-5 Policy proposals #

5-6 Structures, Constitution, method of election of NE/NC. #

6-7 Dinner

7.30 Public meeting on "Building the alternative to globalisation and war"

Sunday

9-11 Reviving militant democratic unionism #

11-12.30 Workshops--Unions including NUS

12.30-1.30- Lunch

1.30-3 Workshops--Movements

3-4.30 Workshops--Building Socialist Alliance (finances, membership, media, running election campaigns, website etc)

4.30-5.30 Election of National Executive/ National Conveners

5.30 The Internationale ■

National Office working group

[Unanimously adopted by the February 21, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]

1. To endorse the following initial division of labour for the Socialist Alliance national office working group:

- Media contact and development: Michael Morphett and Norbert Braumann

- Publications production: Jorge Jorquera

- Web site: Sean Vickery and Justin Randell

2. To include an appeal for volunteers for the National Office working group in the first edition of the *National Newsletter*. ■