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#### **DISCUSSION**

<b>For a united, multi-tendency socialist party</b>	3
<i>By Peter Boyle (Marrickville branch and DSP National Executive)</i>	
<b>Moreland Peace Group and Wills Branch Socialist Alliance</b>	5
<i>By Jonathan Sherlock (Wills branch)</i>	
<b>Socialist Alliance: what way forward?</b>	7
<i>By Workers Power</i>	
<b>Fundamental principles and differences of opinion concerning Cuba</b>	7
<i>By Jonathan Sherlock (International Socialist Organisation)</i>	
<b>The tasks of Australian socialists: an unaffiliated member's view</b>	9
<i>By Mark Lockett (Perth branch)</i>	

#### **DOCUMENTS**

<b>List of signatories for Open Letter ("Developing the common socialist voice") at May 3, 2003</b>	12
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#### **RESOLUTIONS AND AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTIONS FOR THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

<b>Resolution to the Socialist Alliance from Workers' Power</b>	13
<b>Socialist Alliance: Turn to the workplace</b>	14
<i>By Lisa Farrell and Carlene Wilson (Workers' Power Australia)</i>	
<b>Proposed constitutional amendments</b>	17
<i>By Mark Lockett (Perth branch)</i>	

#### **ORGANISATION OF THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

<b>Further draft motions covering organisation of the Second National Conference</b>	20
<b>Draft proposals re workshops for Conference</b>	20



## DISCUSSION

# For a united, multi-tendency socialist party

*By Peter Boyle (Marrickville branch and DSP National Executive)*

On April 25-26 the national committee of the Democratic Socialist Party discussed the initiative by the Non-Aligned Caucus in the Socialist Alliance to move forward the process of left regroupment. We decided to support this initiative wholeheartedly because we see this as a real opportunity for the socialist left to claim a significant space in Australian politics today.

This space, we concluded, has grown even further since the invasion and occupation of Iraq because this imperialist aggression provoked unprecedented global protests. While these protests may have ebbed for the time being they mark the accelerating accumulation of dissent against neo-liberal globalisation and the wars it has unleashed.

The national committee meeting also reaffirmed the position in our March 19 letter to the Socialist Alliance national executive:

The DSP remains prepared to cease building itself as a public organisation and to devote its resources, instead, to building the Socialist Alliance. While we would urge other affiliate organisations to do the same, we do not insist on this as a pre-condition to the DSP taking this step. (See *Discussion Bulletin* Volume 3 Number 3, page 5)

When we heard that the International Socialist Organisation (whose national committee met on the same weekend) had decided to stay in the Socialist Alliance we welcomed their decision. The DSP remains confident that all the different components can, and should, continue to work together despite some different perspectives. We should continue to discuss these differences in a comradely way within the framework of the Alliance.

### Concrete opportunity

The Socialist Alliance has achieved quite a lot over the last two years and as a result it has attracted hundreds of new members, a clear majority of whom do not belong to any of the socialist organisations which originally set up the Alliance. Our assessment is that there are many more people who will join the Socialist Alliance if it demonstrates that it is moving forward towards becoming a united, multi-tendency socialist party.

The immediate build-up to the invasion of Iraq, including the racist attacks on refugees and the attacks on democratic rights (in the name of fighting “terrorism”), speeded up the crisis in the Australian Labor Party which began in the mid-1980s. While the Greens have taken much of this space in the electoral arena there is still a growing space for explicitly socialist politics.

However, it is not enough for socialists to declare that we will fight for the social reforms and concerns abandoned by the ALP. We have to demonstrate that we offer a popular but principled socialist vision and that we can build a democratic and viable alternative political vehicle if we are to win a hearing from those disillusioned with the ALP. The question is: how, and with what material, can we do this?

Over the last few years a leftward moving layer of the working class has identified itself in several militant struggles. Key leaders of these struggle have joined the Socialist Alliance. This is where the Socialist Alliance is a concrete opportunity for socialist regroupment. We have an opportunity here to regroup not just a number of the existing socialist organisations but more importantly to regroup with the much larger body of socialists who are not members of the affiliate organisations of the Socialist Alliance.

However, most of the non-aligned socialists who have been attracted to the Alliance (and the many more potential members) see the greater unity of existing socialist groups within the Socialist Alliance as significantly underpinning the viability of this project. The non-aligned members may have criticisms about the detailed politics and practice of the various affiliate groups but they recognise that there is something valuable to preserve from their years of socialist organising. This appreciation is shared by many in the militant sections of the trade union and other social movements.

### The challenge of the Greens

In his recent contribution to the Socialist Alliance *Discussion Bulletin* (Volume 3 Number 5, page 5) Comrade David Glanz of the ISO argued that the rise of the Greens “will cramp Socialist Alliance’s style for some time to come, but they do not wipe out our relevance nor occupy the totality of our potential political space”.

### Comrade Glanz noted that:

The rise of the Greens “adds to the space available for radical alternatives, such as our own”.

A layer of working class and union activists feel “instinctively” uncomfortable with the Greens because the Greens are weaker on questions that touch on working class and union life.

Both these points are true but they are no grounds for complacency with the present state of Socialist Alliance. The Greens have taken some supporters and members from the Socialist Alliance. The Greens are beginning to attract a few trade union leaders and certainly all of us who have been working on election booths know that over the last few years a layer of young workers have voted for the Greens.

One of our advantages over the Greens is that we bring together activists who are not primarily focussed on electoral work. Among the Socialist Alliance members are comrades who play a leading role in many social movements. Socialist Alliance comrades were at the forefront of the movement against the invasion of Iraq, and led the movement in many cities. Other Socialist Alliance comrades have led significant militant struggles in the trade union and other social movements.

Our problem is not one of scaring away people because the Socialist Alliance becomes more of a party and less a loose electoral alliance but the reverse. If the

Socialist Alliance does not become more than what it is—involving a greater commitment of resources, more development of its political program and platforms, more united intervention in the struggles of the day and more effective organisation—then the Greens will claim a growing share of the socialist constituency.

There is a layer of the working class that is disaffected with the ALP but wary of the Greens. This is represented electorally in cities like Newcastle with a significant vote for the Progressive Labour Party (PLP). The Socialist Alliance should continue its efforts to persuade the PLP, the Communist Party of Australia and other left groups outside the Alliance to affiliate.

It is a fact that we won't do justice to the political potential for an explicitly socialist alternative in today's turbulent political situation if we don't take steps towards building a united, multi-tendency socialist party through the Socialist Alliance.

The political character of the regroupment

The April 27 letter from the ISO to the DSP states that the ISO is:

...hostile to using the Alliance as a site of revolutionary regroupment. At the same time, and contrary to what may appear common sense, we do not think that a shift to a 'multi-tendency socialist party' would broaden the appeal and effectiveness of the Alliance, but rather would narrow it.

The thousands of erstwhile Labor supporters now looking to left-wing alternatives at the ballot box are less likely to be drawn around or into the Alliance if it is recast as yet another small left activist party, even if it is larger than both of our organisations combined.

The Alliance must remain open and welcoming to reformist workers and students. It must have its own independent existence and not be a rebadged version of the existing far left...(Discussion Bulletin Volume 3 Number 5, page 2)

This is a misunderstanding of what sort of regroupment is possible and desirable in the Socialist Alliance today. Like the comrades in the Non-Aligned Caucus, the DSP supports a process of *socialist regroupment* through the Socialist Alliance even while we, like the comrades in the ISO and other affiliate groups, remain convinced of a revolutionary perspective.

As the Non-Aligned Caucus draft statement says, the multi-tendency socialist party should be as broad as possible:

All who consider themselves socialist, of whatever stripe, should be welcome in our ranks. But it has to be a distinctly Socialist party. We are not simply an anti-capitalist opposition party. We are for the replacement of capitalism with socialism. This gives our Alliance an intrinsic transformational dynamic. It clearly separates us from other parties, particularly the Greens. It also provides us with the solid foundation to build united fronts and coalitions within the working class and anti-capitalist movement, and win new layers to our side. (Discussion Bulletin Volume 3 Number 5, p.12)

The political program of such a project is *in development* and this very process of development can attract and win more people to socialism. Further, this process of programmatic development is necessary to

rescue socialism from the heritage of dogmatism and sectarianism that has plagued the revolutionary left for many years. This is the flip-side of the much bigger problem for the socialist movement represented in the betrayals by social democracy and various failed bureaucratic socialist regimes.

In this country, the capitulation of the ALP to capitalist neo-liberalism has meant that that party has abandoned even the most token commitment to socialism. However, the ALP retains its hegemonic position in the trade union movement and so the socialist message has been confined to the political margins in the working class. To re-win working class support for socialism, the Socialist Alliance needs to popularise its socialist message and vision, without sacrificing principle. This is also a challenge that can and must be taken up in the process of programmatic development.

Over the last two years the Socialist Alliance has been able to take principled stands on the key issues of the day—imperialist war, refugees, the federal budget, etc. And this has been done through democratic and inclusive discussion and decision-making. This means that we can be confident that we continue to collectively develop the socialist program of the Alliance.

Revolutionaries and reformists

The Non-Aligned Caucus draft statement says:

5. We accept and welcome a strong revolutionary socialist stream as an integral part of our vision of a broad Socialist party.

All the foundation affiliates are based in this tradition, and a substantial number of non-aligned members as well. The very presence and integration of the revolutionary affiliates as tendencies ensures the continuation and vitality of this tradition in all its diversity. We need and want their theoretical and political experience, perspectives and resources to grow the Alliance and help plot the road ahead. We want all the affiliates to integrate, not just some. The unique perspective each brings will, of course, not always find its way into the majority platform, strategy and tactics of the party. We all need to be patient and constructive in our respective contributions, and in our listening to what others are saying, and accept the majority outcome. The constructive engagement of differences will strengthen and deepen the intellectual and political capacity of the party and enable it to move forward with an effective unity. (Discussion Bulletin Volume 3 Number 5, page 12)

We agree with this perspective on the place for different socialist trends in the Alliance.

Revolutionaries should not hide the fact that we hope to win others to our revolutionary perspective but we have to do so within the democratic framework of the Alliance and demonstrate respect for diverse view, patience and responsibility for the common project. Over the last two years, the Socialist Alliance has made gains in fostering this political culture and the revolutionary groups within it have respected this culture. It is this approach to developing the socialist message of the Alliance—not some attempt to keep the politics of Socialist Alliance to some social democratic lowest

common denominator—that will attract people to the Socialist Alliance.

The ISO says that:

The position of the ISO is that, at the same time as participating in the Alliance, we continue to stand for the building of an independent revolutionary party. Such a party, while inevitably smaller than any ‘multi-tendency socialist party’ would have the advantage of theoretical clarity and the unity in action which flows from sharing a common political framework. (*Discussion Bulletin* Volume 3 Number 5, page 2)

The ISO and other affiliates should not be worried about the space for independent revolutionary organisation. The full freedom of socialist tendencies to organise and publish their material, which is recognised in the Socialist Alliance constitution, allows plenty of room for any affiliate or any group of members that may be formed to carry out such independent organisation.

Democracy the guarantee

The concern raised by the ISO that the Socialist Alliance might become a “rebadged” version of a single tendency has been clearly answered by the “Developing the common socialist voice” document now signed by more than 100 non-aligned members of the Socialist Alliance:

Non-aligned members are not persuaded by affiliate concerns of the Alliance being dominated by any one particular tendency. For affiliates to abandon the terrain of debate for socialist regroupment on the basis of caution, or worse, on the basis of historical circumstances long past, will be to realise precisely a *de facto* single tendency domination. As long as the Alliance retains its current character as a democratic organisation, where a consensus-building activist culture and the force of the better argument prevails, the case for retaining separate party organisational structures by affiliates rings hollow... (*Discussion Bulletin* Volume 3 Number 3, page 3)

For its part, the DSP has no interest in the Socialist Alliance becoming simply a rebadged version of one or more of its affiliates. To put it bluntly, that would be to go to a lot of trouble for little gain. We have openly stated, on numerous occasions, that the real promise of regroupment through Socialist Alliance was between already organised socialists and the much bigger layer of socialists *outside* these organisations.

Practical way forward

We in the Socialist Alliance are not confronted with a completely untested path of socialist regroupment. While we should not take developments in any other country to be an absolute model, the DSP has made no secret that it is inspired and very supportive of the sort of process of regroupment followed by the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). We think that their eight years of experience, which began with a Socialist Alliance similar to ours, indicates that a united, multi-tendency socialist party can take the movement for socialism forward in today’s world political situation. I attended the SSP national conference earlier this year and found it very impressive. I would urge all Socialist Alliance comrades to study this regroupment process. Australia is not Scotland but the SSP’s experience is valuable and relevant.

However, on the way to Scotland I also witnessed the deep frustration and demoralisation of many members of the Socialist Alliance in England because the regroupment process has stalled there.

The Socialist Alliance in Australia should make the choice to keep on the road of socialist regroupment by supporting all practical ways forward.

If we decide at the May conference to pursue greater unity—guided by the seven principles put forward by the Non-Aligned Caucus draft statement—we can be confident that the socialist movement in this country will make significant progress in the next period. We’ll create our own model! At least we ought to give this our best shot. ■

## Moreland Peace Group and Wills Branch Socialist Alliance

*By Jonathan Sherlock (Wills branch)*

### The march

On Saturday 22 February 2003 there was a successful rally in Moreland. 400-500 people showed up after five weeks of publicity, including handing out around 1000 leaflets at the huge Melbourne anti-war rally the week before. Speakers included Carlo Carli (local ALP state MP), Pamela Curr (Greens), Bilal Cleland (Islamic Council of Victoria), Martin Higginbotham (local ALP councillor), Steve Roach (local ALP councillor and CFMEU organiser), Nur Shkempi (a woman who wears traditional Muslim clothing and has become a lively activist with the Moreland Peace Group while looking after *four* children!), and Richard Lane (of Wills Socialist Alliance and a National Convener).

We marched up Sydney Road for several blocks, before finishing off in the car park across the road from the Brunswick Markets. We had picked this finishing point as an obvious landmark. However, it also proved a strength on the day that many Muslims who shop at

Brunswick Markets (it has excellent Halal butchers, poultry and fishmongers as well as green grocers) came across to join the rally. Many people joined the rally as we marched up Sydney Road, and those who did not applauded as we went past.

Cheers for the speakers were loudest when people spoke out against the war even if the United Nations endorsed it. The Australian Labor Party speakers hedged around this question by calling for the UN General Assembly (as opposed to the Security Council) to be the place where a war on Iraq would need to be endorsed. It was their way of opposing the war while keeping the UN relevant as an international body (“it’s important in Labor history” said former mayor Robert Larocca to the Coburg ALP meeting the week before).

Forty-six people signed up as interested in Moreland Peace Group. Over \$420 was collected to cover costs.

## The group

Moreland Peace Group was formed along with many other local groups late last year. Its initial aims were simply to build towards the 15 February rally and to call local actions to promote the message of no war with Iraq. Socialists were always at the heart of the group. Affiliates (the International Socialist Organisation in particular) made sure that we collected names of interested people at our local paper sales, and made sure we contacted those people. There are six ISO members in the group all of whom have played roles from designing and distributing leaflets, organising public meetings, writing press releases, talking to the media, talking to local ALP branches, talking to local community groups and chairing the meetings and the rally. There are three other Socialist Alliance members involved as well.

We also took (non-socialist) Moreland Peace Group activists with us to the Moreland City Council meeting to get their support. We were published in the local papers in the lead up to the 15 February rally, which led to much more interest as people contacted us. The Moreland Peace Group contact list is now around 200 people, about half of whom are on e-mail, making for easy information sharing. This compares to the local Wills Socialist Alliance branch which has 68 members.

Moreland Peace Group is a broad, informal group that is founded on one basic idea: No war on Iraq, with or without UN endorsement. There are socialists, anarchists, Muslim activists and other interested people, who are mostly getting involved in activism for the first time.

## The success ... ?

The success of the Moreland Peace Group is that it is focussed around a broad slogan on which there is agreement, and it is focussed on action. This is the classic method of the united front as outlined by Trotsky. It is a place where socialists have a chance to meet non-socialists and show how socialist politics works in practice. We are also opening up dialogue with people about our general politics. There are several activists with whom I am opening up a more serious dialogue.

## ... so what is the role of the Socialist Alliance?

The Socialist Alliance is not focussed around a broad slogan or one or two issues. It is an organisation with a formal platform. It runs candidates in elections as a political party. The Socialist Alliance was not formed to take action around a specific issue or even a series of issues. It was originally formed so that socialists could intervene in elections with a united voice, and attract unaligned people into the membership on the basis of a broadly socialist platform.

It deliberately leaves unanswered the question of revolution or reform, but its platform includes demands that lead to confrontation with the system very quickly. This is best characterised by Trotsky's method of Transitional Demands. But the Socialist Alliance is more than just an encapsulation of demands: it is an actual organisation.

The ISO has described the Socialist Alliance as a "united front of a special kind". I think this description

fits – that is, it is a grouping that thrives on action. The heartbeat of the Socialist Alliance is taking initiative around elections. But this does not mean that we are inactive between elections; we also act on concrete political questions of the day, like the budget or attacks on unions or the war, while seeking the broadest possible unity around socialist demands as encapsulated in our platform.

Socialist Alliance members must also themselves be involved in campaigns with non-socialists. I think we are better at this than the Greens, who have some great individual activists, but do not have the traditions of Socialist Alliance members in terms of involvement in campaigns between elections.

## If the shoe fits?

The Socialist Alliance cannot be "made to fit" all situations and scenarios confronting the movement. The Moreland Peace Group is a case in point: it is a very successful united front, where instead of being starting a campaign under the umbrella of the Socialist Alliance, ISO members got involved in the Victoria Peace Network and used the invitation to set up local groups to find people in the Moreland area. This included many non-socialists. The Moreland Peace Group has Muslims, anarchists, Greens and community activists involved, many of whom will never join the Socialist Alliance, but all of whom represent people with whom we should work to build the largest possible anti-war campaign (which also ties in issues of racism against Muslims, and also refugees).

If the Socialist Alliance branch had been the starting point for the Moreland Peace Group rather than the Victorian Peace Network, we would have missed an opportunity to work with all of these other people. The local anti-war campaign would have been weaker as a result. The Wills branch has had three mail-outs (i.e. not e-mail but via Post), several e-mails, and the entire branch has been rung once – and our branch meeting attendance has not risen. At the same time, while the Moreland Peace Group mobilised 500 people at a local demonstration, and had weekly meetings of 25 or so people at the height of the campaign.

It was therefore a good thing that the Wills branch of Socialist Alliance did not start to meet fortnightly. The same eight or nine activists would be turning up to an additional meeting, talking to nobody but each other, instead of concentrating on building the local anti-war movement directly alongside of much wider layers of people in the local community. But this is not to say that we can afford to take the local Socialist Alliance branch off the boil. The Wills Socialist Alliance was very visible at the local demonstrations; as chair of both rallies, I wore the Socialist Alliance t-shirt, and the banner was there as well as the stall.

From this work, our local profile has been built much better than if we had started by making the Wills Socialist Alliance branch the centre of anti-war activism.

I think that election campaigns should remain the crucial central feature of Socialist Alliance activity. This is because most Australians conceive of politics in electoral terms. We are looking to give those people an alternative to the left of Labor, and a class alternative to

the Greens. That also means we must be active between elections so that people see that we are hear to stick around, and we are serious. But it does not mean that the

Socialist Alliance should become the primary vehicle for each and every campaign. The Moreland Peace Group experience bears this out. ■

## Socialist Alliance: what way forward?

*By Workers Power*

Since September when the Democratic Socialist Party first made its proposal for greater unity in the Socialist Alliance there has been increasing discussion of what kind of organisation the Socialist Alliance needs to be and indeed whether it can become that organisation.

While the various affiliates have their own ideas about this, the dominant ideas have been those of the two biggest affiliates—the DSP and the International Socialist Organisation. The DSP's vision of a multi-tendency party similar to the Scottish Socialist Party and the ISO's idea of an electoral united front—a united front of a special kind.

Since the beginning of the Alliance, Workers Power have been clear. The organisation that the Australian working class needs is not a new ALP, not a half-way house, but a revolutionary workers party. The question then becomes how do we get there.

We don't think that the ISO's solution is any solution at all. Rather than working for the Socialist Alliance to become closer to what the working class needs, their united front policy would see it ossify into purely electoral politics—an organisation that came alive for a few months a year but was not much more than a name on a placard at other times.

But we don't believe the DSP proposal offers a way forward either.

The DSP have couched their proposal in organisational terms. They have underplayed the real political differences that exist not just between affiliates but within the membership as a whole. Other than continuing to work together and discuss they offer little to gain greater programmatic unity within the Alliance.

They believe that we can build this unity simply by working together. But this is not reflected in reality.

The fact that the Socialist Alliance has been able to make political statements and has not fallen apart has more to do with the willingness of the participants to reach compromises than with any massive new agreement about politics.

And what this has meant is that often political statements whilst reasonable, have not had the sharpness needed to cut across the ALP, the Greens and even the rest of the Left outside the Alliance.

The DSP's multi-tendency party would be another compromise—but one on a much larger scale. We would have a kind of organisational unity—a paper, organizers and officers—an apparatus. But not the political unity to direct that apparatus.

We need to go back to some basics here.

Do we believe that the working class both in Australia and as part of an international class needs to make a fundamental change in society; needs to make a revolution?

Do we need a party, of whatever kind, to achieve this?

It seems safe to assume that every member of the Socialist Alliance can answer an at least qualified yes, a fundamental change is necessary and yes, it can't happen without a party. Otherwise why are we all members of the Alliance?

The ISO may not want to call the Socialist Alliance revolutionary, in case people are put off. But we can't avoid the fact that no workers' party currently exists in Australia and one is urgently needed.

Which brings us back to the question of politics—of program.

The DSP's suggestion would see us with an organisational conglomeration of the far left and those people already convinced of the need for a new kind of political formation. This might not be such a bad thing—but it is far from the best we could hope for.

As the DSP have made clear themselves—there are real working class forces looking for an alternative to the ALP. Some of these people may be attracted to the Greens. Rather than cheer this on as a turn to the left, we have to win people to the socialist alternative, not the radical but ultimately bourgeois politics of the Greens.

In fact combating the increasing hold that the Greens have over those who see themselves to the left of the ALP should be one of the central tasks not just of the Socialist Alliance but of all forces who genuinely want a new workers' party in Australia.

We need something more than a reuniting of the left. To build a party we certainly need more than a regroupment project. What we need is to be part of a campaign to build a new workers' party in Australia.

Such a campaign would have to start with the militant trade unionists who are already sympathetic but not yet ready to join something which is not a real force in parliament or even the majority of the unions. And such a campaign would give us a real lever with the disaffected left of the ALP and those people in the Greens who already see themselves predominantly as socialists or activists.

Most importantly, the campaign for a new workers party would give us a real audience in the working class to have out the arguments about politics, about program; that will be necessary if we are to form a genuinely united party that can provide a real, a credible, alternative to the ALP and the Greens.

In that discussion Workers Power will continue to make the arguments we have been making from the start—that the kind of party the working class needs in Australia is a revolutionary one and that only a revolution can grant our class the freedom from exploitation and oppression.

But as part of a real campaign to build a new workers party this will be a debate which all the current members

of the Socialist Alliance, whether in affiliates or not, will be able to have with the whole of our class. ■

## Fundamental principles and differences of opinion concerning Cuba

*By Jonathan Sherlock (Wills branch and International Socialist Organisation)*

In *Discussion Bulletin* Volume 3 Number 4, Bernie Rosen drew attention to the question of Cuba as a detail that can be worked out among the left, and that it and questions like it should not be a barrier to unity.

I disagree. The question of Cuba cannot be glossed over in any discussion of socialist theory. But more importantly, the different positions on Cuba lead to different visions for the Socialist Alliance.

If you believe that Cuba is somehow socialist, however distorted, then you believe that it is possible to bring about socialism via several hundred guerrilla fighters coming down out of the mountains at the right moment and seizing power. You will believe that the working class, while important, is not the only agent for bringing about socialism; that socialism can be brought about without working class struggle.

If you believe that several hundred revolutionary guerrilla fighters at the right time can bring about socialism, then you will believe that the most important facet of the movement are the activist and revolutionary groupings. Your focus will be those activist and revolutionary groupings, and you will build them through enunciation of principles. The state of the wider labour movement will be secondary to the state of the revolutionary left. The connection between the revolutionary left and the wider labour movement will also take second place to the state of the revolutionary left itself. This will mean that the most important thing about the Socialist Alliance is how it rearranges or brings into relationship the existing revolutionary left groups. It will mean you are in favour of regroupment of the revolutionary left, or at least a multi tendency party.

On the other hand, I believe that Cuba is not socialist (I also believe nothing that the USA says about Cuba, and I believe smashing the Batista regime was a good thing). Revolution from below by the working class is the only road to socialism.

Therefore, the state of the working class and the labour movement is my starting point. As a revolutionary, I want a connection to the people in the labour movement who are looking for a voice to the left of Labor, whose class consciousness is not satisfied by the Greens. Compared to the combined revolutionary left, including the Socialist Alliance affiliates and non-affiliated members who describe themselves as Marxist or revolutionary, this is an enormous audience.

There are 68 members in Wills branch. We got around 300 votes in both times we stood in the local council elections in the Hoffman ward, and we have only six members who live in that ward. In terms of the mainstream political spectrum, our vote was tiny (5.5%).

In terms of how much bigger the vote is than the core of activists, it is huge. But our audience is even bigger than this: it is also Green and Labor voters (the latter voting with gritted teeth). Willpower (even by the most well-meaning activists in the universe) is not enough to connect with this audience.

It is no co-incidence that union work is also an obvious fit for the Alliance project—it is where the working class is congregated in the largest numbers, and where it is strongest. The size of this audience is also enormous compared to the numbers of revolutionary activists. It is imperative that we create an Alliance where non-revolutionaries who are looking for a socialist political home can feel comfortable. Otherwise revolutionaries will have less chance to talk to these people, and this will be an obstacle to building a better revolutionary left, a better broad left, and ultimately a stronger movement.

The working class is not yet revolutionary, and so the primary question for me is how we turn that around. We cannot connect with this wider audience if we first deliver an ultimatum that they must agree with revolution in order to join the Alliance.

The Socialist Alliance is therefore not a focus for regroupment of the revolutionary left. It is a place where revolutionaries can campaign alongside non-revolutionaries in elections to offer the working class a socialist voice. If the Socialist Alliance becomes a regroupment of the existing left, it will make it much more difficult for non-revolutionaries to join. It will sever the tentative links we are already making with the union movement.

There does still need to be a revolutionary party, but this is a separate question. Even if the ISO was in favour of regroupment of the revolutionary left, we would still be in favour of a Socialist Alliance as a “united electoral front” that sought connections to those beyond our ranks who are beginning to look to the left.

We are not in favour of revolutionary regroupment, because this would immediately mean we have to confront all of the questions we disagree on: Cuba, East Timor, (Deflected) Permanent Revolution, State Capitalism just to name a few.

The continuing success of the Socialist Alliance will be a focus on what we agree on—taking an openly socialist program to the Australian working class. This primarily means electoral work, but it doesn’t mean dropping everything between elections either, and where the hat obviously fits (e.g., union work) it is also a useful tool. ■

# The tasks of Australian socialists: an unaffiliated member's view

*By Mark Lockett (Perth branch)*

I began writing this piece after Dick Nichols' piece "Putting socialism on the Australian political map" while I do partially agree with that document I do have a different analysis of the political situation and I have a different analysis of priority of the tasks facing the alliance.

## What is the Australian political situation?

The political establishment, meaning in this case the ALP, Liberals and Nationals, is weakening and discredited in the eyes of many. The collapsing credibility of the ALP is obvious to us but we should not underestimate the collapse of the credibility of the Libs and Nats. We are all aware that the Greens were able to win their first single member parliamentary seat (Cunningham) on the back of the votes of disillusioned Labor voters. However 18 months earlier the Western Australian Greens nearly won the blue ribbon Western Australian state Liberal seat of Nedlands.

The state seat of Nedlands has been held by the Liberal party since 1952 (and before that was held by a conservative independent) and it has never been marginal in all that time. In that election Labor ran a candidate (which is unusual for by-elections in very safe Liberal seats) the Labor candidate got about the same vote as the they normally get in Nedlands, about 20 per cent. The Liberals almost lost the seat of Nedlands because of votes they lost to the Greens and Liberals for Forests parties.

The other element in the rise of the Greens is the collapse of the Australian Democrats. They (apparently) failed to get a member elected in the NSW election and performed dismally in the Victoria state election as well as the preceding Western Australian and Queensland elections. They did not do so badly in the Federal election in 2001 mainly because the charismatic leadership of Natasha Stott-Despoja and a preference deal done with the ALP. Normally the Democrats have a policy of handing out "split ticket" how to votes. However in the 2001 Federal Election the Democrats did a preference deal with the ALP, if they had not they would have lost their Senators in Victoria and Western Australia as well as New South Wales. Almost every single lost Democrat vote will be picked up by the Greens.

One Nation has continued to implode with the greedy self interest and incompetence of the various One Nation MPs and other leaders becoming apparent to all, not to mention the legal campaign against Pauline Hanson. One Nation's voters appear to have shifted their support back to the parties they supported previously. Other small right-wing outfits the Christian Democratic Party, the Citizens Electoral Council, etc remain isolated and largely irrelevant.

The main outlet of this disillusionment has been the increased vote for the Greens. The progressive stance

taken by Bob Brown on the advice of Ben Oquist has provided the Greens with an opening but the much of the support they have has come about because they are seen as the only other acceptable option.

That leaves us with the socialist left. About two-thirds of the groups on the Australian left and a large number of non-affiliated socialists have joined the Socialist Alliance. The Socialist Alliance and its constituent organisations are still small but have an impact beyond their numbers. However, the Australian socialists are almost unknown outside of a small inner-city clique. Although I will note moderate progress has been made in some suburban areas and regional centres.

The last factor affecting the Australian political situation is the situation of the movements. It is the situation of the movements that is the most important factor in Australian politics for socialists. Since the Battle of Seattle there has been a large upturn in certain social movements in Australia and significant break with the politics of the trade union (and student union and official peace movement, etc) bureaucracy witness the protests at Woomera last year, the World Trade Organisation meeting in Sydney in November, the convergence at Baxter, the M1 protests and the anti-war protests, particularly the student anti-war protests. These protests represent the beginning of a new phase in Australian politics where disenchantment with the political establishment will not just be shown through votes for alternative political parties but an (admittedly small for now) section of the working class and its allies will take direct action against capitalism and its worst excesses.

## The nature of the economic problems facing capitalism

Currently there is major turn towards barbarism going on in mainstream politics with the government locking unauthorised immigrants in concentration camps, fighting what seems to be the first of many wars of aggression and introducing some of the biggest restrictions on civil rights in Australian history. The question is why?

Part of the reason put forward by some leftists (but not in the preconference discussion) is the perceived weakness of any potential opposition to these measures. I completely reject this notion. The basic thinking behind this is the unions are weak today, the Soviet Union is long gone, as is the CPA (the old CPA that is) and the Trots are as small as ever. This is completely wrong. One thousand Australian activists turn up to the Woomera Detention Centre in the middle of the desert and liberating 40 inmates is not a weak movement.

Capitalism is falling into economic crisis. In the 1930's Trotsky and others believed the crisis of capitalism was terminal that it would be either socialism or barbarism. They did not anticipate the long-term post WWII economic expansion. The post-WWII boom was

ultimately possible because of large reductions in the cost of energy brought about by the development of a cheap and efficient internal combustion engine and widespread electrification in the industrially developed countries. The post war reconstruction was also a factor. There is no possibility of another, cheaper energy source being coming into large-scale use in the next few years. There will not be another 1950s.

Because of the natural tendency of the rate of profit to fall over time coupled with the inability of the capitalists to bring about a new long expansion leave the system in crisis. One way that some corporations have tried to overcome this crisis is to cook the books (a la Enron). Another way is mergers, the late 1990s saw record merger after record merger. This appears to have cooled off in the last few years though. A merger between two competing corporations can result in increased profitability for the merged corporations but not for capital in general. The last method is to take wealth from the working class (and the peasants in Third World countries, and the middle class in some cases, etc) and to give it to the capitalist class. The ways in which this is done can be very varied and it is not just a matter of simply trying to depress wages.

## The broad tasks facing Australian socialists

A while ago, (April 13) at the Palm Sunday peace march. I met an old friend of mine whom I hadn't seen for several years and who would be easily described as an independent activist and he was quite pissed off about what wasn't be said by the speakers on the platform which was: "What are we going to do about the war?" But I think the bigger question being asked by a section of the working class is with all these attacks, with things going backwards and so on: "What are we going to do about it?" And even more fundamentally: "How are we to live?"

Socialist Alliance has the ability to answer these questions in a way that will be heard by those outside the inner city clique to which socialists has been confined for so long. None of the affiliates on their own have this ability. Why not? Because of a lack of numbers, their sectarian and opportunist errors in the past and because of the roles to be played by unaffiliated members of the alliance.

At the moment there is a very real gap though between what is needed and what the Socialist Alliance can provide. This gap has been brought about because of the history of socialism. But now an opportunity to close the gap exists.

## The nature of the gap between potential and reality

Currently there many individual members of the working class who are questioning the world and who are asking the question of how are we to live. Such people usually have no contact with the inner-city ghetto, which the left has traditionally been associated with and as such socialist answers have been unavailable to them. Due to changing life circumstances particularly relying on private instead of public transport and rarely going into

the city centre I rarely ever see any socialist paper sellers on the street, there are many others like me.

Even among those are associated with left there is a gap between the questions being asked and the answers being given by socialists—my friend's question about what is the anti-war movement going to do next is not answered well by the Socialist Alliance at the moment.

## Specific tasks for Australian socialists

Below is partial list of what I consider to be the specific tasks for Australian socialists. Note this is not an exhaustive list: it is a list of those that I have a specific opinion on and I do agree with the other tasks that Dick outlines in "Putting socialism on the Australian political map".

### Improved propaganda for socialism

Currently the Internet acts as an excellent source for information on current events. It is very easy through viewing websites like Indymedia to get accurate and up to date information about events of interest to the left. The Internet is the preferred form for retrieving such information as it is instant, free (actually very cheap), anonymous (mostly) and worldwide. The combination of these factors mean that daily or hourly detailed reports can be produced and made accessible to millions by activists without having to have the resources of Rupert Murdoch available.

By and large what is missing though is analysis. 'Why is this taking place?' And strategy, 'What can be done to change it?'

Currently most groups belonging to socialist traditions publish documents on the Internet however only the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) (see [www.wsws.org](http://www.wsws.org)) has taken any step to specifically target the Internet. This is in stark contrast to the general trend among independently produced media where Indymedia, etc can publish straight away. By contrast the DSP takes a week (except they take 10 weeks a year off), the ISO takes a fortnight, all others take a least a month. However what Indymedia *et al* cannot do is put forward an analysis and an alternative strategy.

Specifically, Socialist Alliance does need its own media source. Therefore I propose that the Socialist Alliance publication be a web and paper publication (in that order of priority). Submission shall be open to all members of the Alliance and to anyone else with the approval of the editorial board.

Given the current situation in the Alliance I believe a bi-monthly publication schedule is appropriate.

Contributions received shall be published immediately and in full subject to reasonable and non-discriminatory editorial policy. While it may be necessary to limit contributions for reasons of space in the paper version of the publication no such limitation exists on the Internet.

That the alliance publication should not be considered a 'news' media source (although it should continue to carry news, particularly news that the mainstream media will not carry) it should be a magazine and the production of socialist analysis its most important goal.

## Geographic expansion of Socialist Alliance

I have put forward a number of proposed constitutional amendments, one of which is to end the automatic association of branches with federal electorates. One of the reasons for this (and there are several others) is to allow maximum size of branch meetings. My experience has taught me that the optimum size for a political party branch meeting is between six and twelve people. This size means that the meetings can be run on a fairly informal basis but still give everyone a chance to contribute. There is also a tendency to view a body that is attracting more than that number of people as doing "quite well" so there is no need for any new people to step up and take on a larger role. If meetings regularly get smaller than that it can be very demoralising and can end up being quite unrepresentative of the membership as well. I therefore would urge states to create branches following these criteria.

It is also necessary for Socialist Alliance to start setting up branches in the suburbs (i.e., where the working class predominantly live). This is no easy task, it takes a long time and a lot of effort to find people who live in suburban areas and bring them into the functioning of the alliance. But this is a critical element of being able to reach out to broader layers of the working class.

## Trade union intervention

Some sections of the working class will attempt to resolve the questions of "What are we going to do about it?" and "How are we to live?" through the trade unions. Already some have had a go via the Worker's First group in Victoria and other rank-and-file campaigns. There will be other attempts by the working class to use the unions for fight back against the capitalist's offensive.

We need to keep these fightbacks in perspective. Only a minority of workers are trade unionists and only some of these are going to be in a position to launch a counter attack against the capitalist class. It therefore follows that only a minority of the membership of the

Alliance will have the opportunity to participate in trade union struggle. However the Alliance must make sure that the links between trade union militants and the alliance, particularly the relationships with those members of the Alliance who are students, unemployed, etc., are built.

The second point is that the work of members of the alliance in the trade unions will often be in collaboration of the dissident members of the ALP and trade union bureaucracy. We need to make sure that we go into these relationships with our eyes wide open.

## In conclusion

The Socialist Alliance was not brought into existence because its affiliates thought it was a good idea (although it is and always was). The intensification of the capitalists' attacks and the nature (and fact of) a working class fight back against them, particularly in the form of the anti-capitalism movements, changed the political landscape for the left.

For the entire pre-1999 history of non-reformist and non-Stalinist socialism in Australia there were only limited gains to be made from socialist (and broad left) unity. After the Battle of Seattle and the S11 protests in Melbourne this changed, there was a new movement, which was going on the offensive. This movement is searching for ways in which it can struggle against the capitalists, one way that it is trying out is the Socialist Alliance. Socialists now have more to gain by uniting.

Socialist Alliance's role in the working class movements is changing we are being pulled along whether we like it or not. The role of the individual affiliates shall also change whether they like it or not. If we do not consciously change the nature of our organisation(s) to match these changes then the result will be more defeats for the working class than would have otherwise been the case.

This is our task.

*The author can be contacted at [mlockett@bigpond.com](mailto:mlockett@bigpond.com).*

■

## DOCUMENTS

### List of signatories for Open Letter ("Developing the common socialist voice") at May 3, 2003

*[Names in italics are those added to the list since the publication of Discussion Bulletin Volume 3, Number 5.]*

**Adelaide Branch:** David Lockwood, David Scrimgeour, *David Nicks*

**Bankstown Branch:** Jepke Goudsmit, Graham Jones, Raul Bassi, Ben Gock, Bernie Rosen, Desar Bassi, Leigh Howlett

**Brisbane District:** Dave Riley, David Lafferty, Fay Waddington, Mark Cronin, Bernie Neville, Sam Watson, Haeng-Cho Halls, Robert Austin, Peter Riedlinger, Anita Muhlhaus

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

**Darwin Branch:** Ray Hayes, *Robyn Waite, Kathy de la Rue, Colin de la Rue*

**Eastern Sydney Branch:** Kerry Klinner, Noel Hazzard, Maureen Frances

**Geelong branch:** *John Goldman, Coral Johnson, Greg Krausz, Paul Johnson, John O'Brien*

**Hobart Branch:** Rob White, *Peter Baker*

**Illawarra Branch:** Len Pickering, Maureen Pickering, Joanne King, Sophie Williams, Dane Warren, Christina Sacco, Joanne King, Mark Hilder, *Naomi Arrowsmith*

**Launceston Branch:** Alan Hasdell, Barry Hicks, Vicki Walker, Sally Wiltshire

**Lismore Branch:** Andrew Watson, Lyn Stewart; Perry Libeau, Jim Knight, Alan Peattie, Barbara Elliott, Doug Burt, Neville Cain, Eric Watson, *Hannah Watson*

**Marrickville Branch:** Mitch Bond, John Reynolds

**Melbourne North East Branch:** Lalitha Chelliah, Louise Walker, Robert Cecala, *David Goodall*

**Melbourne Western Suburbs Branch:** Craig Johnston

**Newcastle:** *Niko Leca, Fred D'Silva*

**Parramatta Branch:** Katrina Heckendorf, Alastair Dickinson, Allison Maxwell

**Perth/Fremantle Branch:** Kiraz Janicke, Chris Cain, Edith Leonard, Archie Leonard, Roger Raven, Marcus Whisson, Les Wynne, Annemarie Whisson, Rene Smeets, Stuart Sherlock, Daniel Watson, Margie Svejska, Peter Wilkie, *Sandy Zawadski-Meredith, Alex Whisson*

**Seat of Melbourne Branch:** Alejandro Rodriguez, *Geoff Breen, Naomi Crafti, James Doughney*

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

**Sydney Northside Branch:** Juanita Feldbauer, Michael Morphet, Graham Moore

**Toowoomba (at large):** Alan Bradley

**Wills:** Maureen Murphy, Simon Millar, Lucy Beaton, *Meryan Tozer*

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

## RESOLUTIONS AND AMENDMENTS TO RESOLUTIONS FOR THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE

### Resolution to the Socialist Alliance from Workers' Power

#### The political future of the Socialist Alliance

1. The Socialist Alliance needs to decide on its future direction if it is to play a positive role in the development of the class struggle, if it is to grow into a significant force on the Australian left and if it is to contribute towards the building of a real mass alternative to Labor. In short the Socialist Alliance needs to decide what sort of organisation it wants to become. This Conference resolves to set the Socialist Alliance on a new course. It should set as its goal the creation of a powerful movement, involving forces beyond itself, committed to the formation of a new working class party.

2. The essential elements of this new course are rooted in the objective possibilities that are emerging in the class struggle:

- the hostility of a layer of militant workers to Labor and their preparedness to consider a break from it
- the growth of a mass anti-war movement, including some Labor MPs and anger among the Labor left at Crean's perceived backdown on troops out.
- the internationalisation of the struggle against war and globalisation and the internationalism of workers and youth that has developed as a result of this.

However, we recognise that, for a wide variety of reasons, many of the people who desire an alternative to Labor are not convinced of the need to join the Socialist Alliance.

3. To take advantage of this situation the Socialist Alliance has to constitute itself as a campaigning force for the creation of a new workers' party alongside forces outside the Alliance. We are not the socialist alternative to the ALP (a proto party). Our failure to make a significant sustained electoral breakthrough, to attract large numbers of former Labor supporters to our ranks, to transcend our existence as a coalition of far left groups and individuals are all proof of this. The Democratic Socialist Party's multi-tendency party is not the answer nor is to continue as a primarily electoral united front as the International Socialist Organisation envision. We must seek to build alliances with much wider forces than those currently organised by the Socialist Alliance (in the unions, the anti-capitalist movement, community and anti-racist campaigns etc.) in order to campaign alongside them for a new workers' party in Australia.

4. In practical terms this means:

- the Socialist Alliance should seek to build links with trade unionists, including trade union leaders who will not join the Socialist Alliance but will work with it around the project of building a new party The national executive is charged with attempting to convene a meeting (or meetings) involving Alliance and non-alliance trade union representatives to discuss such a project.
- depending upon the success of such a meeting there should a series of meetings around the country, with trade union sponsorship where possible, on the theme of

building an alternative to the ALP. Speakers should include representatives of the Socialist Alliance and others from outside the organisation who are in broad agreement with the project

- approaches should also be made to other political forces (parties, general anti-capitalist campaigns and prominent individual activists from single issue campaigns, prominent left wing writers etc.) to endorse the project—provisionally named “The Campaign for a New Workers' Party”—and participate in it with the Socialist Alliance and any trade unions (local or national) that join it

- the Socialist Alliance should offer to work and support dissident Labor MPs and their supporters in the Labor Party (who will be numerous), without demanding that they become members of the Socialist Alliance, with a view to persuading them to become part of the campaign for a new party

- even if we are not successful in the short term in committing broader forces to this project we can, as the Socialist Alliance, make clear in future elections, rallies, local meetings and other activities—as well as in literature that we produce—that this is what we stand for and this is what we propose to others outside the Socialist Alliance.

5. None of the above means that the Socialist Alliance should cease to stand candidates in elections or undertake campaigns. It does mean, however, that in such activities we seek to promote both the idea building a new workers' party and, where possible, promote fighting for it in practice by combining with other forces both to stand candidates or undertake campaigns and activities. Furthermore, in terms of Socialist Alliance candidates standing in elections we affirm the right of such candidates to publicly express their own views, publicly espouse the programs to which they adhere, while making clear that such views are not necessarily those of the Socialist Alliance as a whole.

6. The issue of what sort of party we are campaigning for has long been a source of dispute inside the Socialist Alliance. Some comrades favour the rebuilding of an “old” style Labor Party, others a coalition (multi-tendency party on a centrist basis), others are against any sort of party, while others are pledged to building a revolutionary party unambiguously committed to the overthrow of capitalism and the destruction of the capitalist state and its replacement with a workers' state based on workers' councils and a workers' militia. The truth is that these debates are currently conducted amongst ourselves rather than with significant numbers of workers in the wider labour movement. Our task should be to broaden that debate and decide on the character of a future party only when real forces (which could be measured by trade union affiliations to the campaign, numbers of individuals signed up to it, campaigns prepared to sponsor it and so on) could come together and set up a party. To that end we should recognise the full freedom of all organisations and

individuals to publicly express and campaign for their own views of what the party's program should be up to the point where a democratic conference constituting the party and deciding upon its program is convened. Even after that we are in favour of maximum internal democracy to facilitate those who disagree with the

program decided upon to have the right to persuade the majority of their views.

7. Finally the National Executive is charged with producing a short pamphlet setting out the case for the building of a new workers' party, for organising a campaign to turn the slogan into practical action and launching an appeal for others to join us in this project. ■

## Socialist Alliance: Turn to the workplace

By Lisa Farrell and Carlene Wilson (*Workers Power Australia*)

*[Some sections are based on the Manifesto of the League for the Fifth International "From Anti-Capitalism to Revolution", which can be found at <[www.workerspower.com](http://www.workerspower.com)>. This is a counter-resolution to the draft proposed by the National Conveners, for the Socialist Alliance 2003 National Conference.]*

### Cover note

We in Workers Power believe that the draft resolution proposed by the National Conveners is weak in a number of areas. Therefore it does not adequately achieve its main aim: to clarify why the Socialist Alliance should focus on workplace and trade union work, and just as importantly, how it can win new layers of the working class not just to militant trade unionism, but to socialism.

In the resolution below we have begun with a reminder of the role of the working class as the key agents of change—the force that can lead the struggle against capitalism, and ultimately to overthrow it. At the same time, we have attempted to outline where the key weaknesses in our class currently exist, namely in the area of the crisis of leadership.

We go on to more sharply outline how socialists—revolutionary socialists—should approach trade union work. In particular, we outline how the trade union bureaucracy are a block to the achievement of real gains for the working class; how this is a result of the nature of trade unions under capitalism, as tools for negotiation and mediation between the bosses and workers. We therefore need to put demands on this (mis)leadership, to show in practice how they will consistently side with the wrong class.

The rank and file of the trade unions and workplaces should be central to our work. We support and build rank and file initiatives, particularly around the calls for greater union democracy and unions based on militant class struggle. These forces—both current and future union members—will be key to transforming the unions into the real fighting organisations of class struggle, and at the same time developing the new layers which will become the vanguard of the fight against capitalism.

We outline how socialists should approach the question of workers control—which for us has to be combined with rank and file control over strikes, occupations, industrial action—a key question for militant trade unionists. Further, for socialists, the issue of workers control runs central to all our work, as it is this that, in a practical way, bridges the gap between the demands of workers today, and the means for overthrowing capitalism.

Finally, we also recognise that the Socialist Alliance has a long way to go in making inroads into the organised working class. We have outlined some modest, but important steps that we believe need to be taken. In particular, we believe that there is currently an artificial separation between the branch building and campaigning work of the Socialist Alliance and our workplace work.

We think that this document should be discussed and voted on as a whole, in counter-position to the resolution currently on the table. We understand that many comrades would be tempted to only support section D—Our immediate tasks. But we urge you to read the whole resolution, as there is a consistent method behind the whole document.

The question of how to approach trade union and workplace work—and ultimately the class as a whole—is central to the work of all socialists. As revolutionary socialists, we in Workers Power believe that critical to this work is how do we approach the trade union bureaucracy and the reformist leaders of the workers movement.

We need such a clear approach, one based on a vision of not just how to re-build the union movement but on how to replace the current misleaders with new anti-capitalist class fighters. While rebuilding the union movement is important, this alone is not enough, and is not doing justice to our ultimate goal of winning our class to anti-capitalism and to workers' power on the road to socialism.

### A – The working class and its leadership

1. Powerful as the world's rulers are, there is one force that can master them. Against the billionaires stand the billions of wage earners who make and circulate their profits. Strikes reveal the potential power of the working class in action. Without our work not a cent goes into the bank accounts of the billionaires, the whole machinery of exploitation comes to a halt.

2. We produce everything and we can produce it without the exploiters. Yet this cannot happen unless the working class is united and conscious of what it wants. Another world—our world—is possible but only political organisation can bring it about.

3. The capitalists attempt to impede us. To do this they alternatively repress us or fill our heads full of diversions and religions. Their strongest weapons are to set the workers of one nation against others, to set men against women, to set white against black.

4. But the capitalists will not succeed in making us, the workers, forget that we are a class. Class-consciousness appears and reappears wherever there is struggle and organisation—in trade unions, in parties, in popular committees and co-operatives. These organisations grow, decline, collapse, are destroyed, and are reborn.

### **The unions**

1. All over the world workers have used their traditional unions to fight the effects of globalisation. But they were largely not up to the task. Struggles ended in defeats, even across whole industries. Demoralisation spread, as globalisation was used to intimidate workers, their union leaders and political parties.

2. By the 1990s, governments and employers only had to mention “globalisation” to secure the submission of many workers’ unions to the needs of corporate capital. The results were plant closures, outsourcing, enforced part-time work, worsening job conditions, wage cuts, declining health and safety standards, anti-union laws.

3. For the great majority of private sector workers, real wages have fallen. Even where pay remained stable work has intensified and been made insecure. Alongside them, stand the shrinking numbers of public sector workers, whose wages have stagnated and have suffered from privatisation.

4. Even with the massive expansion of the working class in the “third world” over the past decades, the trade unions only organise a minority of the international working class. The established bureaucracies are characterised by conservative sluggishness in their attempts to bring in new layers of workers.

5. Confrontations with employers, militant tactics, mass pickets, occupations, strikes and internationalism, are all necessary tactics in the battles against the bosses. These methods have been made illegal in most countries for the simple reason that they are effective. It will be up to the rank and file trade unionists to bring new life into these methods, as the routinist and legalist officials will oppose any disturbance of their cosy positions of mediation with the bosses.

### **Labor**

1. The Australian Labor Party was formed from the beginning on the basis of reactionary protectionist policy—policy that sets Australian workers against our international brothers and sisters. It has always limited itself to reforming capitalism, never wavering in its loyalty to the exploiters.

2. At the same time it remains a party of the labour movement. It has retained its roots in the workers’ organisations, with the purpose of incorporating them into capitalism. They have maintained intimate links with the trade unions by direct affiliation, organising political fractions in the unions, and ensuring a massive presence amongst the leaders and militants of the trade unions.

3. Internationally, social democracy has now even accepted the dictates of globalisation. Hawke and Keatings’ “Accord”, Blair’s “Third Way” and Schroeder’s “New Centre” all have promoted market forces at the expense of old reformism. They argue that privatisation of industries and infrastructure cannot be halted. That taxes on business have to be lowered, workers’ rights in the workplace diluted or scrapped,

even social welfare system has to be forced into partnership with the private sector. And faced with the “war against terrorism” and the rise of a racist right, these parties have taken to supporting the attack on the rights of immigrants and basic civil liberties.

4. Meanwhile revolutionary socialists are presently reduced to a small minority in Australia and most countries. Our primary task is to break the illusions the working class maintain in reformist leaderships. We have to work patiently alongside reformist workers, demand that Labor leaders fight for our class and thus in practice show the betrayals of these leaders. At the same time there is a burning need for the working class to organise a party which is truly its own, and thus wrest leadership from reformism.

## **B – Socialists and the trade unions**

1. The pressure of capitalism creates “workers’ leaders” who accommodate and capitulate to money and power. In the processes of collective bargaining and negotiation, the union leaders claim high wages for themselves, cripple union democracy, and downplay or abandon militant direct action. In other words, union bureaucrats are agents of the capitalists—but they are part of the workers’ movement. So to dismiss their influence and try to ignore them means to leave the masses under their control.

2. We demand that the union bureaucrats—as the current leaders of the working class—break with the capitalists, to quit their joint-boards with the employers, their national and municipal state offices and go into the streets and onto the picket lines. We do this to aid the whole rank and file to judge them in the light of their own burning needs.

3. In addition, the unions—tending to organise the labour aristocracy, the more privileged sections of the working class—also tend to reflect this layer’s sectionalism and narrow craft-consciousness. They often develop a self-defeating tendency to shun politics, in the name of neutrality, though at the same time the leaders often deliver union members’ votes to reformist parties acting to defend the interests of capital.

4. In contrast we organise to bring fresh forces into the movement—women, the racially oppressed, gays and lesbians, youth—largely ignored by the bureaucrats. These new forces help to confront the narrow consciousness—including the nationalism, racism, sexism and homophobia—predominant in sections of the union movement. We advocate their right to caucus.

5. The rank and file of the unions, in contrast to the bureaucrats, have no material interest in maintaining the system of capitalist exploitation. At moments of heightened and generalised struggle, the rank and file repeatedly resort to direct action in their own interests, to organise the unorganised, to break down the sectional barriers that divide the unions. The rank and file even attempt to use their organisations for directly political objectives.

6. The rank and file’s fundamental interests are thus not merely distinct from those of the bureaucracy but in direct contradiction to them. In order to escape the treadmill of rising prices and wage battles and to overcome exploitation, the rank and file are drawn into

the struggle against the system of wage-labour and capital itself.

7. To achieve our goal of removing the bureaucracy, we advocate rank and file opposition movements committed to four key goals:

- a. trade union democracy;
- b. the election and recallability of all officials;
- c. the payment of officials at the average wage of their members;
- d. a program of militant class struggle.

All strikes should be under the control of delegates of the workers on strike. We favour industrial unions and trade union unity on the basis of democracy and class struggle.

8. Alone this is not enough. The real vanguard of the class struggle must at the same time be rallied into a revolutionary socialist force, which can establish strong links with the masses and, in a revolutionary situation, win leadership of the movement. Solving this crisis of leadership is a vital precondition of the victory of our class over capitalism.

## **C – Socialists and the fight for workers' control**

1. The system of capitalist exploitation requires that the bosses control every aspect of the production process. The search for higher productivity and profits endangers safety, erodes health and intensifies exploitation. Increasingly, therefore, the working class is obliged to counter capitalist control with workers' control so that even basic and partial demands are met. In essence, this means a fight to veto the plans and actions of the bosses wherever they harm the interests of workers.

2. Workers' control must not be confused with "workers' self-management" or "workers' participation". This seeks to incorporate working class representatives into co-responsibility for the success and profitability of the capitalist business, observance of business secrecy. In times of prosperity, this ensures production uninterrupted by strikes and, in times of crisis, trade union consent to job losses, real wages cuts, productivity drives and an end to job demarcation.

3. But workers' control at the workplace level is always incomplete. The capitalists keep their plans and accounts a closely guarded secret from their workers. Against business secrecy, therefore, we fight for the opening of all enterprise bank accounts, account books and computers, to the inspection of the workers themselves. If such investigation reveals genuine bankruptcy then we demand socialisation of the enterprise under workers' control and enforce it by occupation. The abolition of business secrecy is designed to expose the bankruptcy of the capitalist system as a whole, its corruption, dishonesty and the mismanagement of the economy, its parasitism, its tendency to squander the wealth that workers create, and its grossly inequitable methods of distributing that wealth.

4. The greatly increased application of science and technology to production demands other forms of workers' control. Because the introduction of new technologies is subordinated to capital, its consequences are more and more concealed from the workers. They get to know about them only through rationalisation, work

hazards, intensification of work or through environmental disasters. This means that workers' control committees, based on the factory floor workers, need to win the support and cooperation of technical and scientific workers.

5. The best form of organisation for conducting the struggle for workers' control is the factory or workplace committee. By organising all the workers in a workplace regardless of trade, shop, union affiliation or membership, the factory committee is able to unite the whole workforce, direct it towards a daily struggle for control and challenge the power of the boardroom. Moreover, it can play a role in the struggle to transform the unions themselves into class struggle industrial unions. The factory committee must be based on direct democracy, with delegates who are recallable, in daily contact with the workers and elected by shop and mass meetings.

6. Such bodies establish a regime of dual power in the workplace and their presence demands an answer to the question—who rules here, the workers or the bosses? As such they are characteristic of intense periods of class warfare. And, just as dual power in society cannot last for a protracted period without being resolved in favour of one of the contending classes, nor can it in the factory. The factory committee is compelled to advance, ever more audaciously, in the fight for workers' control. If it does not, it risks either disintegration or incorporation. Workers' control must be a launching pad for a struggle of the workers to assert their rule not just in one factory or office, but across society as a whole—just as the Zanon workers in Argentina are learning the lessons of now, the hard way.

## **D – Our immediate tasks**

The Socialist Alliance is not well placed in workplaces and the trade unions. And so we must turn our attention to changing this. In particular, we must end the current separation of union and workplace work from the daily campaigning and branch building activities of the Socialist Alliance.

### **Implementation**

To help implement workplace and union work of the Socialist Alliance, at both State and National levels we will:

1. Focus our attention on bringing union and workplace work into every branch of the Socialist Alliance, into every area of our campaigning work. We should focus our attention not only on workers in struggle, but also on building union organisation in workplaces wherever we are located.
2. Ensure that all comrades involved in trade union or workplace work—both current financial members of the Socialist Alliance and those working closely with us—meet semi-regularly, at both state and national levels, to share and compare experiences, and to consolidate this experience.
3. Appoint Trade Union Organisers. These organisers will help to coordinate trade union work, be a central point of communication, circulate information across workplaces and industries, and drive the implementation of the trade union work where necessary.

## Key aims

1. To bring political issues into the workplaces and unions. To this end, all Socialist Alliance launched campaigns must have a workplace and workers movement focus. These issues can include: anti-war, anti-racism, anti-capitalist, anti-WTO, anti-privatisation, cross union and international solidarity, political affiliation and funding, the need for a new party of the working class.
2. To build a periphery around the Socialist Alliance in particular workplaces and industries and to organise them. This work should be assisted by developing workplace and industrial bulletins, backed up by the relevant Socialist Alliance branches.
3. To build rank and file initiatives and fight for a rank and file movement—this movement should be based on the call for transforming our unions on the basis of democracy and militancy.

## On political representation

# Proposed constitutional amendments

*By Mark Lockett (Perth branch)*

Several amendments are presented here. They fall into four broad categories:

- Changes to the accountability of Socialist Alliance parliamentarians
- Changes to the method of election of state representatives of National Executive
- Changes to the method of election of the National Conveners
- Changes to the nature of district and state organisations

## Rationale

### Changes to the accountability of Socialist Alliance parliamentarians

1. The section covering the accountability of Socialist Alliance Parliamentarians is extended to include local councillors.
2. It is proposed that Socialist Alliance parliamentarians shall be primarily accountable to their local Alliance organisation. The intervention of the national bodies of the Alliance should only be necessary in truly exceptional circumstances.
3. The people who work in Socialist Alliance parliamentary offices should clearly be accountable to the alliance, they are conducting political work for the alliance. In the ALP and the Liberals and the Nationals and the Democrats and the Greens workers in parliamentary offices are accountable only to the parliamentarian they work for. They therefore use their position as a parliamentary office worker to engage in factional struggle on behalf of their parliamentarian. As a democratic organisation it would be completely unacceptable for Socialist Alliance office workers to engage in this sort of thing. Of course Socialist Alliance office workers are perfectly entitled to engage in internal debate but only on the same basis as any other member.

The Socialist Alliance will argue:

1. For the full democratic control of union members over affiliation and funding to political organisations.
2. Against the disaffiliation of unions from Labor, as Labor continues to represent significant illusions in reformism of large sections of the working class in Australia. Any campaigns to disaffiliate from Labor will therefore necessarily take the form of being anti-political.
3. Against union support for the Greens—they are not a party of or for the working class. While having some policies that are marginally better than the major parties, the Greens remain representative of sections the “middle class” that are partly concerned about popular social issues. They cannot be a party that progresses the interests of the working class and support for them is a backward step.
4. For unions to take up the fight to build a real alternative to Labor—a new party of the working class, that is consistent in its fight for the interests of our class.



4. In several places the phrase “specific direction” appears. The intent here is the show that a branch (for example) can pass a motion requiring their member of parliament vote in a certain way. While this can be implied from the phrase “...are accountable to...” it was not used universally and I think “specific direction” is clearer.

### Changes to the method of election of state representatives of National Executive

Currently State and Territory representatives on National Executive are appointed by the National Conference this means in effect that they are accountable only to the National Conference. I have proposed several changes, which would make them accountable to the state or territory they represent.

### Changes to the nature of district and state organisations

Since State and Territory representatives are proposed to be accountable to the state or territory they represent there needs to be the formal structure in place to do this. Changes include annual state conferences to elect representatives to national executive and the necessary rights of the membership of a state or territory to hold their member of the National Executive to account.

### Changes to the method of election of the National Conveners

Since the National Conference would no longer elect state representatives it would not be possible for a member who was not representing an affiliate to be a Convener. This situation is remedied, in effect the National Conveners shall be elected from the floor of the conference and shall then automatically gain a seat on the National Executive as non-voting members. I have decided to make them non-voting in order to preserve the existing balance of the National Executive.

## Specific amendments

### Legend

Normal text – sections of the constitution not proposed to be changed

**Bold text** – additions

~~Strike through~~—deletions

### Socialist Alliance Parliamentarians

Keep section 4.1 adding reference to local councillors

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

Remove the old section 4.2 and replace with:

**4.2.1 Socialist Alliance parliamentarians, local councillors and persons employed to work in the offices of Socialist Alliance parliamentarians shall be subject to the specific direction of the Branch that covers the electorate except that if their electorate is covered by more than one branch or their electorate is not covered by any branches they shall be subject to specific direction by their state organisation.**

**4.2.2 Socialist Alliance parliamentarians, local councillors and persons employed to work in the offices of Socialist Alliance parliamentarians shall be subject to the specific direction of the National Executive which shall override any specific directions given by their local branch or state organisation.**

**4.2.3 Socialist Alliance parliamentarians, local councillors and persons employed to work in the offices of Socialist Alliance parliamentarians shall be subject to the specific direction of the National Conference which shall override any specific directions given by their local branch or state organisation or the National Executive.**

Section 4.3 Shall not be changed.

Add new Section 4.4

**4.4 Socialist Alliance parliamentarians shall be required to gain the consent of the body they are accountable to in Section 4.2.1 to be able to employ persons to work in their office(s).**

### National Executive

Add Section 7.1 and renumber accordingly

**7.1 The National Executive shall consist of :**

- **Three National Conveners (non-voting)**
- **Two representatives from each of the larger affiliates**
- **One representative from each of the smaller affiliates**
- **One representative from each State Organisation**

Delete Sections 6.4 renumber accordingly.

Amend the new section 6.4 as follows:

**6.5. The National Executive other than state representatives for 2001-2002 shall be elected according to the following formula:**

Three National Conveners (non-voting)

Two representatives from each of the larger affiliates;

One representative from each of the smaller affiliates;

One member from each state or territory;

Any affiliates joining the Socialist Alliance after the conference shall be accorded representation on the National Executive, at the invitation of the National Executive;

Between conferences, if necessary, proxies to the National Executive may be (±)

appointed by the affiliated group, in the case of a representative of an affiliated

group, or (ii), in the case of a representative of a state, elected by a state wide

meeting or the relevant state co-ordinating committee.

**No person shall be elected to more than one voting position on the National Executive.**

Add a new section 6.6 and renumber accordingly

**6.6 State representatives shall be elected by state conferences as described in section 9.3. State representatives elected at the first conference of Socialist Alliance shall continue in office until July 31st 2003 or until the state they represent holds a State Conference, whichever occurs first.**

Add a new section 7.7

**Twenty eight days notice shall be provided for all National Executive meetings. Agenda for and minutes of all National Executive meetings shall be sent to all members of the National Executive, to all branches, districts, state organisations and any other member who has registered an interest in receiving them. The National Executive shall discuss no motions other than emergency motions. A motion is an emergency motion if an absolute majority of the National Executive agree it is an emergency motion.**

### Local branches

Amend section 8.3

**8.3 Branches shall elect office bearers, including a Convener, Treasurer and Returning Officer, at least annually. Office bearers can be voted out at any properly convened branch meeting. Office bearers shall be subject to the specific direction of the branch.**

### State and district organisations

Amendment the Title of Section 9

- ~~State, District and City Wide Organising Committees~~ **States and Districts**

**There shall be an annual state or territory conference in every state or territory where Socialist Alliance has Branches.**

**All financial members of Socialist Alliance who reside in the relevant state or territory shall have the right to vote at a state or territory conference.**

**The quorum at a properly constituted State conference is 5 members or 10 per cent of the financial membership, whichever is the greater.**

**State and territory conferences shall elect their representative on National Executive on at least an annual basis. State or territory representatives can be removed from office by their state or territory conference at any time. State or territory representatives on National Executive shall be subject to specific direction by their state conference.**

**Between conferences, if necessary, proxies for state and territory representatives to the National**

**Executive shall be elected by a state conference or the relevant state coordinating committee.**

**State and territory representatives on National Executive shall be required to provide regular reports on National Executive business to branches in the state they represent.**

**Two or more branches may decide to form a district.**

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

~~States wide or city wide conferences and districts~~ shall elect their own executives and office bearers, as

required, and shall have control of all campaigns at their corresponding level. Such committees shall usually be formed on the basis of one delegate per branch, with affiliate organisations who are not represented by branch-elected delegates also eligible to nominate a representative.

**A Special State or District conference shall be called if the State or District executive decides, if at least one branch in the state or district demands it or if 25% of the membership of the state or district petition for a state conference. In the case of a conference called for by a branch or petition the conference must be held within 30 days. ■**

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## ORGANISATION OF THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE

### Further draft motions covering organisation of the Second National Conference

*[The following resolutions covering the organisation of the Second National Conference were adopted by the May 2, 2003 hook-up of the National Executive.]*

#### **Chairpersons**

That affiliates and the Non-Aligned Caucus be asked to nominate comrades as chairpersons.

#### **Greetings to conference**

To hear greetings from Freedom Socialist Party (US), Scottish Socialist Party, Martin Kingham (CFMEU), Cam Walker (FoE) speaker and sympathetic Green. Time limit to be ten minutes.

#### **Adoption of detailed draft agenda**

To approve the general order of draft agenda, with the National Conveners to produce final version, including reporters and chairpersons.

#### **Security**

Not to have security firm conduct bomb check.

#### **Media**

To propose that the media be allowed to cover the conference but to allow any speaker who does not wish

to be recorded to so indicate, and to include this proposal in the Standing Orders

#### **Videoin conference**

That the National Executive propose to conference that Art Resistance be allowed to video conference, under the same conditions as proposed for the media.

#### **Video presentations**

To include video presentations (on the Scottish Socialist Party and the Florence November 2002 demonstration) in the agenda at Saturday and Sunday lunchtime.

To include video on MUA Rank and File in the lunchtime video projection on Sunday.

#### **Workshops**

To adopt the proposed plan of workshops and moderators, subject to: (i) negotiations with FSP over availability of their comrades, (ii) finding a replacement moderator for Riki Lane for the workshop on building the social movements in the trade unions, and asking Michael Scembri to co-moderate workshop on gay, bisexual and transgender movement.

### Draft proposals re workshops for Conference

*[The following draft outline of workshops for the Second National Conference was adopted by the Second National Conference.]*

#### **Key issues:**

- How to strengthen a Socialist Alliance/left intervention?
- How to build Socialist Alliance in the union/movement?

The job of the moderator is to guide discussion so as to generate feedback and opinion that will the Alliance better address these questions. Each moderator or moderating team should write a brief report of the workshop for the incoming National Executive.

#### **Trade unions**

	<b>Possible moderators</b>
<i>NTEU</i>	Michael Thomson/Susan Price
<i>CPSU</i>	Alison Thorne/Jonathon Sherlock
<i>MUA</i>	Sam Wainwright
<i>AMWU</i>	Simon Millar/Craig Johnston

<i>CFMEU</i>	Ian Bolas/Tim Gooden
<i>AEU</i>	Mary Merkenich
<i>ASU</i>	Maureen Murphy

#### **Youth and student work workshop**

Darcy Byrne and  
Kylie Moon

#### **Building social movements**

<i>Refugees</i>	Judy McVey
<i>Anti-war</i>	Nick Everett and Alex Whisson
<i>Women's liberation</i>	Lisa Macdonald
<i>Gay, bisexual and transgender rights</i>	Michael Scembri

*Building social movements in the unions* Riki Lane

<i>Asia-Pacific solidarity</i>	Iggy Kim
<i>Latin America solidarity</i>	David Golan/Roberto Jorquera