

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

Vol 3 No 12, November 2003

\$2.50

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Socialist teachers: ideas on how to run workshop sessions

By Angela Luvera (Auburn branch)

I did intend this contribution to be completed in time for the state conferences last month — sorry for not getting it together in time.

First a disclaimer: these are just ideas for comrades to work from, a starting point for comrades to come up with the most dynamic workshop possible that suits their topic and audience.

There are three things that I hope that comrades take away from this contribution:

- Different forms of teaching are more effective than others
- People learn in different ways
- Some ideas to start you on your way.

The Learning Pyramid

Despite the fact that there exists a hierarchy of learning practices — so there are more effective ways of teaching than others — most often people fall into the habit of conducting a workshop in a lecture style format in which a talk is presented and then there is hopefully time for questions and answers (group discussion), although often group discussion is given less time than the lecture. But only 5% of knowledge is retained from a lecture (it is only used at universities because it is cost efficient — think of how it might be done in a socialist society!).

The best approach to a workshop is to attempt to incorporate a range of methods.

Have in mind when preparing a workshop that people learn differently. Some people are more visually minded and will retain information more easily if they see the information presented in diagram form, others learn best through reading the information, others from listening to other people nut through the concepts, and so on. Try to incorporate different ways of getting your information across so that the different learning needs are addressed.

Remember also that the people attending your workshop will have different mounts of knowledge. You probably want to pitch your workshop so that everyone gets something out of it. Some ideas that might help this: having a basic definitions page of words and/or acronyms that you either pass out and/or keep up on an overhead that is referred to throughout the workshop; make use of those with knowledge to co-convene the workshop, maybe in smaller groups.

Try to use the knowledge base that comes with your participants — build people's confidence by allowing them to share what they know with the group. Teaching others is a great way to learn.

Workshop structure ideas

Here is list of workshop tool ideas that might be useful to incorporate into your workshop:

- Brainstorming of existing knowledge/main points of workshop on a large piece of paper.
- Getting individuals or groups to create a visual representation (a drawing, collage, graph) of an idea from the workshop.

- Use of games; for example snakes and ladders where if you land on a correct/positive point you go up a ladder, a wrong/negative point you slide down a snake, or memory card games where the two connecting cards have a piece of information written across them. These two games would be useful towards the end of the workshop, after the information has been introduced to the participants.

- Use video excerpts — choose the most useful part of a video that emphasises the point you want to make, maybe make worksheet to go with the video.

- Use the knowledge of the workshop participants — this makes for a more dynamic workshop, more involvement of people, and those with existing knowledge reinforce this knowledge by teaching others.

- Use white boards, overheads, etc. to create a visual image of what you are trying to say.

- Role play — take on the roles of the main people/groups that your workshop features.

- If possible, get participants to do reading before the workshop so that you have a base level of information to work from.

- Break up into smaller groups to nut through a particular aspect each and then have a reporter(s) contribute to the group as a whole.

- Use pictures/slides of events that you are talking about. Possibly even “workshop” the picture — what information is in the picture, who took the picture, what was the purpose, etc.

- Use props — I went to a fabulous workshop once about the Russian Revolution where the woman conducting the workshop used a simple prop (hat/scarf) to take on the persona of the players in the revolution, telling of their participation from the first-person perspective.

- Break the workshop up into a debate format, have two sides arguing out an issue.

- Get your workshop to move around.

- Remembering that the average attention span is 20 minutes, break your workshop up into sections, short and snappy.

- If your workshop is based around a campaigning area, try to gear the workshop towards everyone going away with concrete thinks they/their group can do.

- Any so-called “out there” idea that you can think of, maybe try to remember your best lessons from school/uni and use the best parts from them.

Just a couple of other points:

- Small groups can be useful in encouraging people who don't usually contribute to give things a go. Small groups might discuss through the same or different points from each other then have a representative report back to the workshop as a whole the main points.

- Encourage participants to do their own further self-learning. Make sure you provide the tools to make it easy for them to do so, such as a list of further reading, web sites to check out, other workshops they might like to check out, etc.

- Set up your room to work best for your workshop, to encourage participation. Think about rows versus circle versus small groups, etc. Don't be afraid to change things throughout the course of the workshop.

Again, these are just ideas that I hope will get comrades thinking — go crazy, have fun preparing the most innovative, involving workshop you can think of. ■

Why our federal election vote matters

By David Glanz (National Co-convenor and candidate for Wills)

The coming year will be completely dominated by the federal election — speculation about the date, fighting it, and analysing its results.

All the struggles which are important to us — opposing imperialist war and defending union rights, refugees, and Medicare — will be seen through the prism of the election campaign.

Every rally, protest and public meeting has to become part of the campaign to drive the Liberals out and to build the biggest possible Left alternative. Every socialist vote has to be cherished as a vote for struggle and change.

Yet there is a bizarre argument floating around in the Socialist Alliance — an argument “that the vote we get isn't important”. It's accompanied by the line that the election is simply an opportunity to make propaganda, and that success should be measured by whether or not we recruit to the Alliance.

Don't get me wrong. The Socialist Alliance campaign should indeed flesh out alternatives to this rotten system. We will get a hearing only if we show that socialists have answers to the problems facing working people — concrete alternatives today underpinned by a vision of another world.

And we clearly value every extra member. Scottish Socialist Party MP Colin Fox said on his tour that he'd rather have 10,000 party members than six MPs, and I agree with that.

But he attracted good audiences and media coverage throughout Australia and New Zealand primarily *because* he was one of six SSP members elected to the Scottish parliament.

Very few Alliance members would think that getting MPs is going to fundamentally change the world. Fox was right to say that the parliamentary road to socialism would be discovered alongside Saddam's weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

But the strength and maturity of a socialist party is partly measured at election time. And its successes can be used to amplify the important work it does in the workplaces and communities every day between elections.

In France, the two main Trotskyist parties are putting up a joint list for next year's regional and European elections.

In the last presidential election, when they stood separate candidates, they won three million votes. Together they could capture 10 per cent or more of the national vote and a rugby scrum of seats in the European parliament.

That's more MPs to attract crowds, more MPs to be arrested at protests and on picket lines.

In Britain, the Left is looking to launch a new, broad coalition for the European and London elections, which are run on proportional representation (as are Scottish elections).

Success there isn't more important than mobilising 200,000 to march on a weekday through London against

George Bush. But the election of Left MPs would lift the confidence of those 200,000. It would build the movement.

Winning seats is a distant proposition for the Alliance. There will be no grand breakthroughs in the federal election — partly because the voting system discriminates against minor parties, partly because we are not well known, partly because the Greens are.

But going in to win the best possible vote does matter. The main reason for this is very simple — the vast majority of the Alliance's audience and potential future mass membership judge us by our election results.

That doesn't mean that our activism isn't valued. But how often has a union or community activist said to you: “You Socialist Alliance guys are great — you're always there, always putting in the hard work ... but I'm voting Green because it will make a difference.”

When we have recorded respectable votes — 5.5 and 6.5 per cent in Victorian council elections — it's been noted. Not by ABC *Lateline* or the Swingometer. But the next layer of potential Alliance recruits — a couple of thousand working-class activists across the country — know that 5.5 per cent is very, very good for a new, small party.

In the coming federal election we need to aim for progress. In 2001, with no collective history and without the party name of the ballot paper, we averaged 1 per cent across the country, or about 1000 votes per seat.

This time we should be aiming for 2.5 per cent in many seats, and 4 per cent at least somewhere. Given the weight of the Greens we cannot possibly expect that kind of vote in general, but in some of our strongest areas — if we do the work — it is achievable.

At 4 per cent (about 3000 votes) we not only retain our deposit and get electoral funding, but we cross that invisible line and become a “player” in most people's minds.

An average of 2.5 per cent would mean 50,000 lower house votes nationally — a respectable number in proportion to our membership, one that will make it easier to recruit, and one that will give members confidence in all the other struggles.

One final word on all this: you do not get 2.5 per cent, let alone 4 per cent, in the current circumstances by starting a campaign a few weeks before the election, letterboxing part of the electorate once and covering a dozen booths.

If we want to be taken seriously, we have to take ourselves seriously.

In Wills, we have already begun. I have had my first letter as candidate (on Medicare) in the main local paper, and have spoken at about five events to date. We have written to 20 community groups (so far) introducing the candidate and asking for a meeting.

We will begin letterboxing before Xmas, with the aim of doing the entire electorate twice, and the best areas perhaps more, before polling day. We have drawn up a volunteer

sheet, and are asking both members and supporters to sign up to help in any way they can.

None of this is at the expense of activism. Socialist Alliance members are central to the local peace group, as well as being involved in a range of unions.

If your branch hasn't begun to take the election seriously, yesterday would have been better, but today would be a good day to start. ■

Palestine: a critique of Workers Liberty's position

By Chris Slee (Wills branch)

This article takes the form of a review of the Workers Liberty pamphlet *Two Nations, Two States: Socialists and Israel/Palestine*. (I am basing the review on the 2001 edition of the pamphlet. I have not read the more recent edition, but I am told it has not changed much).

The pamphlet purports to correct the generally held views on the left about the Israel/Palestine conflict. It accuses the left of "demonisation of Israel and endorsement of Arab or Islamicist chauvinism" (p2). In reality it is Workers Liberty that distorts history to downplay the crimes of Israel and the Zionist movement.

The expulsion of Palestinians

Workers Liberty blames the Arab states for the 1948 war in which over 700,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes. The pamphlet cites calls from some Arab leaders for the Jews to be "driven into the sea". But while quoting this phrase several times, the pamphlet fails to quote statements by Zionist leaders calling for Arabs to be expelled from Palestine.

For example, Joseph Weitz, head of the Jewish Agency's Colonisation Department, wrote in 1940: "Between ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples together in this country... The only solution is Palestine, at least Western Palestine [west of the Jordan river] without Arabs... And there is no other way but to transfer the Arabs from here to the neighbouring countries; to transfer all of them; not one village, not one tribe should be left" (quoted in an article in the Israeli newspaper *Davar*, September 29, 1967; cited by Peter Buch in his introduction to Maxime Rodinson's book *Israel, a Colonial Settler State?*, Monad Press, 1973, p16).

These ideas were put into practice in 1948 with the use of terror to drive out most of the Arab population from areas seized by the Zionist militias (the areas which became the state of Israel). This was the only way of creating a "Jewish state" (as distinct from a democratic state with equal rights for Jews and Arabs) on land inhabited by Arabs.

Israel and imperialism

Workers Liberty denies the role of Israel as a watchdog for imperialism in the Middle East. The pamphlet says: "Since 1967, Israel has had heavy support from the USA. However the idea that American imperialism depends on Israel for 'control of the Arabs' is false. The USA has friendly links with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

"In fact the USA's relationship to Israel owes more to the power of the pro-Israeli lobby in the USA's heavily ethnic-patterned politics than to anything else. Arguably, it has hindered US capital in pursuing its real interests in the area

— centred around its oil wealth — more than it has helped it" (p10).

In fact, Israel has played an important role in defending imperialist interests. For example, the defeat of Nasser's Egypt and its allies in the 1967 war was a severe blow to radical Arab nationalism. It prepared the way for the move to the right in Egypt and elsewhere. This benefited imperialism greatly, including by making possible the current "friendly links" with Egypt and other Arab countries.

If we don't see Israel as serving US interests, it is hard to explain the huge amount of US economic and military aid and consistent political support to Israel. While the Zionist lobby in the US is indeed influential, the idea that it could single-handedly force US imperialism to act contrary to its own interests borders on conspiracy theory.

It is true that US support for Israel has political costs as well as benefits. But if there were no benefits at all, the Zionist lobby would not be able to have much impact on US foreign policy.

The "two-state solution"

Workers Liberty advocates a two-state solution to the Israel Palestine conflict: "Two states for the two peoples, combined with fully equal citizenship for Palestinians in Israel, and for Jews in a Palestinian state" (*Two Nations, Two States*, p2).

However the "two state" model is not an adequate solution, since even if Israel withdrew fully from the territories occupied in 1967 (a big "if") that would leave the Palestinians with only 22% of historic Palestine. The Palestinian state would be subordinate to its more powerful neighbour.

Furthermore, the continued existence of Israel as a "Jewish state" would mean the continuation of the second class status of those Palestinians who live within the borders of Israel. Even though they hold Israeli citizenship they are discriminated against in many ways.

Despite these problems most Palestinians were prepared to accept the 1993 Oslo agreement, which they assumed would lead to a Palestinian state alongside Israel. However the Israeli government (whether led by Labor or Likud) has shown by its actions that it does not accept a Palestinian state, even on only 22% of historic Palestine. This is shown by the continued creation of new Jewish settlements in the areas which the Palestinians had expected to become part of their state.

The "two-state solution" has become increasingly difficult to implement as Israel has increased the number of settlements in the occupied territories. These settlements are linked to Israel by roads that cut the territory of the proposed

Palestinian state into tiny pieces. Israel has made it clear it intends to maintain all of these settlements (except perhaps a few tiny outposts). Israel also wants to retain control of the water supplies. Already water management in the West Bank is totally integrated with that in Israel (and of course Jews get most of the water).

Thus Israel has no intention of allowing the “two-state solution” to happen.

This might change if the US decided to put real pressure on Israel to accept the creation of a Palestinian state. Such pressure would have to include the threat to cut off all aid to Israel. Such a scenario might occur if the peace movement in the US grew qualitatively stronger and took up the Palestine issue more consistently, and/or if the US judged that its pro-Israel policy was damaging its interests in the Arab world.

But a two-state situation is unlikely to satisfy the Palestinians. An independent Palestinian state would be poor and dominated economically by its more powerful neighbour. There would be ongoing disputes over a range of issues, including access to water and the likely continued existence of Jewish settlements in areas claimed by the Palestinians as part of their territory. The danger of a new Israeli invasion would remain as an implied threat if the Palestinian state did not do as it was told. Refugees whose families came from areas now considered part of the Israeli state would continue to claim the right to return.

These problems can best be solved through the creation of a single state in the whole of historic Palestine, with equal rights for Arabs and Jews. A two-state situation may occur as a stage on the road to a single state.

To go beyond the “two-state” model to a united democratic state would require the development of a movement in Israel that challenges the ideological basis of the Israeli state. Such a movement would demand equal rights for Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. If these demands were won it would create the basis for further change. The growing number of Palestinians inside the boundaries of Israel, combined with the rise of an anti-Zionist movement among Jews, would create a base of support for the idea of a democratic secular state in the whole of historic Palestine.

Of course, the present situation is a long way from this optimistic scenario. Progressive Jews in Israel are struggling to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. In general they see the goal as being to force the Israeli government to actually implement the “two-state solution”, rather than aiming for a single democratic secular state.

However this can change. In the course of this struggle many will begin to see the limitations of the two-state model.

The right of return

The Israeli state, which gives Jews from all over the world the unconditional right to live in Israel, denies the right of those Palestinians whose families were driven out of what is now Israel the right to return to the place where they (or their parents or grandparents) were born.

Workers Liberty disagrees with the right of return for Palestinians. The pamphlet at one point absurdly equates this demand with the call to “drive the Jews into the sea” (p11-12). Less apocalyptically, it argues that the return of

Palestinians will make it impossible for Jews to exercise the right of self-determination because Jews will become a numerical minority in the Israeli state.

In fact it is questionable whether, in the context of a two-state situation, the right of return for Palestinians would create a Palestinian majority within the (pre-1967) borders of the Israeli state. WL cites the figure of 8.6 million Palestinians, compared to 5 million Israeli Jews. But not all of the 8.6 million Palestinians would return to live inside Israel, even if they were allowed to do so. Many would stay in the West Bank and Gaza if these were part of a Palestinian state. Others would stay in the Diaspora (Jordan, the Gulf states, the US, etc). Hence Palestinians would probably not outnumber Jews inside the pre-1967 borders of Israel in the short term, if they were given the right to return.

And even if Jews did become a minority, that does not necessarily mean they would be oppressed. Whites are not oppressed in South Africa, even though they are a minority — indeed they remain economically privileged.

The right of return would not, on its own, solve the Palestinian refugee problem. In most cases the houses in which the Palestinians used to live, and even whole villages, have been demolished by the Israeli occupiers, keen to obliterate any trace of prior Palestinian occupancy of the land. The right of return would need to be accompanied by a massive program of aid for house-building etc. We should demand that US aid to Israel is diverted for this purpose.

WL assumes that the acceptance of the right of return would lead to the Jews being oppressed by the Palestinians. This is unduly pessimistic.

The return of the refugees is unlikely to occur without the development of a strong movement in Israel questioning Zionism. Such a movement would seek to build alliances with the Palestinians — including both those living inside the pre-1967 borders of Israel and those in the independent Palestinian state (if one is established). The way would be open for an alliance between progressive Jews and Palestinians to campaign for a further step forward — the abolition of the border between Israel and Palestine and the creation of a united democratic state for both Jews and Palestinians.

Trotsky's views

Workers Liberty claims that Trotsky in the 1930s “viewed the demand for a separate Jewish state with growing sympathy” (*Two Nations, Two States*, p20). But the pamphlet does not give any direct quotation in which Trotsky uses the phrase “Jewish state”.

It is true that Trotsky said the following during a discussion in June 1940: “The socialist revolution is the only realistic solution of the Jewish question. If the Jewish workers and peasants asked for an independent state, good — but they didn’t get it under Great Britain. But if they want it, the proletariat will give it. We are not in favour, but only the victorious working class can give it to them.” (quoted in *Two Nations, Two States*, p19).

At first glance, this seems to confirm WL’s contention. Surely an “independent state” created at the request of “Jewish workers and peasants” would be a “Jewish state”?

Not necessarily. While it is not clearly spelt out in the brief remarks quoted above, Trotsky seems to have assumed

that the Arab workers and peasants would have had no objection to the establishment of the hypothetical “independent state”. But they would not be likely to agree to it if the new state drove out the Arab inhabitants of Palestine or made them second-class citizens. Thus we may assume that any such “independent state” would have given equal rights to its Arab and Jewish inhabitants. In this case it would not have been a “Jewish state” but a democratic, secular state.

When Trotsky said that the hypothetical “independent state” could only be established by the “victorious working class”, he probably meant that the new state could only be established following a world-wide socialist revolution. Presumably the Arab workers and peasants of Palestine would have participated in making this revolution. If so, they would have been organised to defend their rights and would not have allowed themselves to be dispossessed to create a “Jewish state”.

WL quotes a number of other statements by Trotsky, but these give even less support to the view that Trotsky favoured a “Jewish state”. For example, Trotsky said: “Are we not correct in saying that a world socialist federation would have to make possible the creation of a ‘Birobidjan’ for Jews who wish to have their own autonomous republic as the arena for their own culture?” (*Two Nations, Two States*, p21). But a Jewish “autonomous republic” or “Birobidjan” is not the same thing as a “Jewish state”.

L G Churchward in his book *Contemporary Soviet Government* (1975 edition, p7) explains the Soviet constitutional concept of “autonomous republics” for certain

national groups as follows: “If the national group is below a certain size or is insufficiently concentrated into a recognisable territory, or has no external (non-Soviet) frontier, then it is ineligible to form a Union Republic but may form an Autonomous Republic within a Union Republic”. He points out that the nationality which gave its name to an autonomous republic did not necessarily constitute a majority of the population within it.

Thus, the Jewish Autonomous Republic of Birobidjan in Siberia was part of the Russian Republic. (Very few Jews chose to live there, but that is another story). By analogy, a “Birobidjan” in Palestine would presumably have been part of a Palestinian or Middle Eastern Arab Republic — which hardly fits in with WL’s argument.

Of course, the situation today is very different from the 1930s. Then the Jews of Europe were either suffering under fascist regimes or facing the threat of fascism. This was the context in which Trotsky wrote about the “Jewish question”. While believing that socialist revolution was the only solution to the oppression of the Jews, he was prepared to consider an “independent state” or an autonomous republic if that was what some Jewish workers and peasants wanted.

Today it is the Palestinian Arabs who are oppressed. The task is to end this oppression. The creation of a democratic secular Palestine will accomplish this goal; but a democratic Palestine will also give its Jewish citizens language and cultural rights similar to those which Trotsky was advocating when he talked about a “Birobidjan”. ■

Organising in the NTEU to beat the Nelson reforms

By Lisa Farrance (Workers Power and NTEU Workplace Delegate, RMIT University)

A number of debates are occurring on the Socialist Alliance NTEU email list — debates which need to be had amongst the broader SA membership. These relate to:

- How do we organise in the unions?
- How do we ensure SA members remain accountable to the membership when in official union positions?
- How can we beat the Nelson reforms and attacks on the unions?

Below is a small contribution to these discussions.

How do we organise in the unions?

The National Council of the NTEU called for the first national strike of University staff in 7 years. The Socialist Alliance played a key role in pushing for this. It was excellent!

However, when the time came to intervene into this strike, we missed a key opportunity.

We had the chance, with the membership in fighting mode, on strike, on pickets, to make the arguments about the type of action necessary to beat back the Nelson reforms. Key to this would have been a leaflet calling for concrete action (see below for arguments around what action we should be calling for and organising).

Instead, we had a leaflet which, while outlining the Socialist Alliance platform around education, did not put forward suggestions for how we should fight for this. Specifically in terms of a guide to action, it was no better than leaflets from the national office of the NTEU, which were significantly lacking on this question. It was more of a wish list of demands than a call to action.

This is an important mistake, and sadly one which was raised by Socialist Alliance members of the NTEU days before the strike.

Some of us fought to get changes made to the leaflet, particularly to at least add a paragraph with reference to the need for further industrial action to be coordinated nationally — and pointing out the fact that an indefinite national strike would be the type of action that can win against the Nelson reforms.

These amendments were blocked, despite being contained within an agreed plan of action for the Socialist Alliance NTEU caucus earlier this year.

The term pluralism is used in the Socialist Alliance to justify actions like:

- Refusals to take votes on key questions (such as how do we fight the Nelson reforms?)
- Refusals to take input into the drafting of key leaflets

- The vetoing of decisions on the basis one person's opposition (otherwise known as consensus decision making).

In fact, this is not very democratic. In practice these methods have been used to silence a revolutionary majority, so as to not potentially offend a few members of the Socialist Alliance. Is this really what the Socialist Alliance wants to build?

While we want to avoid pretending we have agreement where we do not, we also don't want to miss opportunities to test a position in practice — through class struggle. Where debate and discussion has been had, and particularly around important events within our unions, such as a national strike, we should aim to make majority decisions and act on them.

Accountability of officials

There has also been some debate on the list about accountability of union officials in the Socialist Alliance.

The Socialist Alliance needs to become clear:

- Our union officials should and must be accountable to the rank and file of our unions.
- We should be building fighting and democratic unions through rank and file organising.
- This means fighting for rank and file transformation of the unions, not just through running for official positions, but by turning the union bureaucracy on its head.

For regular elections of officials

For accountability and recallability of all officials

For officials on salaries equivalent of those they represent

For the building of militant delegates networks in all our unions

For regular meetings of members to direct the union

For all industrial action to be under the direct control of the rank and file, through elected and accountable action/strike committees.

As the Minority Movement — the rank and file movement in the UK in the early 20th century — put it: "Independent rank and file organisation is necessary. But this independence does not mean abstaining from the fight to get rid of the bureaucracy.

"It means fighting to transform the nature of union officialdom — electing militant fighters to the leadership, placing them under the direct control of the rank and file, regularly elected by it, accountable to it, and making sure it has the same material conditions as the workers it represents."

The same as we expect our parliamentarians to be accountable to Socialist Alliance, so should we expect our union officials to be accountable to the Socialist Alliance — especially when they are on Victorian and National leadership bodies of the Socialist Alliance.

In each case the same principles apply: Accountability through workers' democracy.

This is not an abstract principle — but a principle with immediate practical significance. Officialdom can put enormous pressure on trade unionists: the pressure to concede, to mistrust your members, to downplay the importance of industrial action in favour of more negotiating, even to start to sympathise with the bosses.

This is not to lecture SA members: simply to remind us all. The best way to avoid this is to remain accountable to the Socialist Alliance, or to the member groups of the Socialist

Alliance, and most importantly: to the rank and file of the unions. Otherwise, who are we actually accountable to?

And this becomes all the more critical when organising within a union to beat back the most draconian changes to our sector in decades: The Nelson package, and associated industrial reforms. (Note: See many articles in the left press, and Socialist Alliance web site, for more details on the Nelson/Abbott reforms).

How do we win against the Nelson Package?

The industrial arena is the arena in which we can actually win against the Nelson package and associated industrial reforms — but is the arena that our state and national officials of the NTEU want to avoid wherever possible.

Yes, the IR laws and industrial environment of Enterprise Bargaining create difficulties. But our officials are using these as excuses (not reasons). They use these for:

- Doing very little in the way of strong opposition to the Nelson package as a whole (let's be real!)
- Directing the campaign away from where we have strength — on the industrial front — and into Senate lobbying/2004 electioneering
- Retreating (and I think it is retreating, again!) to local Enterprise Bargaining, instead of a nationally coordinated industrial campaign.

Now the one thing we can do in opposition to this, surely, is argue strongly, and consistently, for a national industrial campaign, up to and including, an indefinite national strike.

On the ground, this means moving motions not only for complete opposition to the Nelson Package, but for industrial action in opposition.

It means building our delegates networks to coordinate such action, both on campuses, and across campuses.

At RMIT, under significant pressure from rank and file members and activists, the Branch Executive finally got meetings of delegates coordinated across campuses and faculties.

From these meetings we hope to develop and build both a political and industrial campaign against the Nelson reforms (and restructuring, and around Enterprise Bargaining) — we'll have to keep pushing for this beyond these meetings, but we're at least showing that the membership does have a will to fight, and that we have a concrete way to harness and direct this energy, through rank and file organising and delegates' networks.

This is not to brush over the biggest problem for us in the NTEU: Our union is not in a great state to fight.

But the state of the NTEU is actually more of a reason, not less of a reason, for going out there and fighting: not for what the officials think is possible, for what we know is necessary to stop the Nelson reforms.

If we can't significantly turn this union around now, under threat of the biggest change to Higher Education since Whitlam, then what are we fighting for exactly?

Consistently pushing for national — yes even indefinite — industrial action is key to turning this union around, by us being in the leadership of rebuilding the confidence in the membership to fight.

This is not abstract, as some comrades have argued — it couldn't be more concrete. ■

For the Alliance's own paper

By Janet Burstall (*Workers' Liberty and Sydney Central branch*)

The Alliance must maintain its independence from the affiliates. This point is I think undisputed in the Alliance.

So how about the DSP's offer of Alliance involvement in *Green Left Weekly*. Is this compatible with the Alliance's independence?

Before diving into analysing the issues — perhaps a metaphor might provide some food for thought.

We can think about the provision of services to indigenous communities. There are two main approaches to providing services. One is via indigenous control and management, hiring in the expertise they need, including from white experts if they consider it necessary. The other is via white management, making the decisions, whilst trying to involve indigenous people possibly as employees, possibly with some sort of consultation.

Or how about a group of musicians that had previously played different styles of music from one another decide to get together and form a new band, with an original combination of instruments and aiming for a whole new style of music. After some time practising and rehearsing together its time to perform in public. The musicians from the previously most successful band suggest that more people would come to watch them if the other musicians just joined their original band and performed their old songs under their name. This would not be true to the original intention of the experimental new band?

The Alliance does need a paper of its own. The Alliance will learn more from, and start the process of assembling the full resources to produce a paper by — developing editorial capacity that is fully independent of the affiliates. That should be the starting point.

Why? Because a political paper is the voice, and the main public face of the organisation that creates and controls it. The Alliance is still developing its political voice. But the strength of the Alliance, the appeal of the Alliance is that it is a genuine new force, that is independent of the affiliates. The proportion of the membership that is non-aligned is only one criteria by which to judge that the Alliance is the new force that we want it to be. The paper, being the voice of an organisation, is the most regular and the unifying public face of a socialist organisation. The numerical domination of the National Executive by non-aligned members will pale into insignificance as evidence of the Alliance as a new force, if the Alliance chooses a publication to appear as its voice while the bulk of that publication is under the editorial control of one affiliate.

But there is more. The process of political discussion that must be involved in developing editorial and content for an Alliance paper would be highly educative. As issues are faced up to and resolved by the editorial process, this has the potential to substantially enhance political agreement and coherence within the Alliance, as well as to clarify the nature of outstanding disagreements. But only if the editorial process can continue and deepen the discussion on the same broad basis that it occurs at the NE and among the National Convenors. However the DSP is the only organisation (with

the possible exception of the ISO) with the people available to contribute consistently to a weekly editorial process.

The difficulty of gaining full participation in the governance of the Alliance of non-aligned members is shown in the difficulty of filling all the spots on the National Convenors group, and the production of a weekly paper would require more time and energy than participation on the NC. So, on the one hand the Alliance needs a paper. On the other hand the Alliance would have difficulty constituting a broadly representative editorial group that would have the time to take full responsibility for editorial management of a paper.

That is the dilemma from an Alliance perspective.

The DSP's offer of SA involvement in the production of *Green Left Weekly* should be assessed in this context by the SA.

The DSP's primary concern appears to be *Green Left Weekly*, its circulation and its reputation which have been built up by hard work and commitment over years. Indeed that should not be tossed away. And furthermore the success of *GLW* could well be of benefit to the Alliance.

However, the DSP's offer of SA involvement in *GLW* is on terms which endanger the precious achievement of the Alliance — a new socialist organisation that is independent of the affiliates. The current DSP offer would not be the necessary step towards the Alliance having ITS own paper, but a step towards the DSP establishing a broader sponsorship for its paper.

The DSP's offer to the Alliance is an apparently simple solution, but it is to fail to do the necessary work of building our capacity AS THE SA, to develop our own collective will in the process. The SA contribution in the current proposal by the DSP involves the SA taking responsibility for coverage OF THE SA. But what the SA really needs to develop is the capacity to collect reports, analysis and views of the broad range of politics. For that the SA must have full editorial responsibility for its OWN publication.

What solution?

It is important to sort out the issue of control FIRST. Many things about a publication may be relatively easy to change, but control is not one of them. An interim editorial arrangement that operates, even if by default, under the effective direction of one affiliate is not healthy for the development of an independent editorial group.

Further, if the editorial group is constituted along similar lines to the National Convenors group, and produces its own publication, then that removes one obvious and quite strong reason for the ISO to refuse to contribute to the DSP's offer of *GLW*. The ISO would not be asked to contribute to the strength of its rival paper, *GLW*, but to an independent Alliance voice. It would be an offer that the ISO should find hard to refuse.

So, how to ensure genuine editorial control to an Alliance editorial group that is independent of any of the affiliates? A first step would be to set a realistic schedule for the production of an Alliance paper, to which all the members of

a broadly composed editorial group would have a reasonably equal chance of contributing equally. I suggest that this would be monthly, initially. The regularity with which the paper comes out should be driven by POLITICAL not marketing considerations. It's better to bring out a paper less regularly that we would like but have the politics sorted and than bring out a paper frequently which causes angst and serious disagreements between the various tendencies and/or the indies.

This should be understood as a transitional publication with a goal of increasing the frequency. This monthly paper should be able to be both an insert in existing papers of affiliates (*GLW*, or *Socialist Worker*) and a stand alone alternative. As the editorial group finds its feet, and develops capacity, it will be possible to review the paper and build it.

What kind of paper do we need?

By David Glanz (National co-convenor and Wills branch member)

Producing a paper has been an important element of building the Left since the days of the French Revolution, so it's no surprise that there's a wide consensus that the Socialist Alliance would benefit from having a paper of its own.

The SA national executive took the first steps towards such a paper at its November meeting. There will be a trial period in which an SA editorial board works in parallel with the editorial board of *Green Left Weekly*. The Alliance will discuss this trial at the May national conference, with a view to taking on *GLW* as its own paper.

I moved an alternate motion at the November meeting. Although it lost 7-14, it gained the support of the majority of affiliates. I want to explain why I moved it.

Producing a regular publication presupposes two things:

Resources, both human and financial; and political agreement on the aim of the publication.

I believe the Alliance has not yet cleared the hurdle on either of these counts. Taking on responsibility for a 24-page weekly newspaper at this stage may not build the Alliance — the danger is, quite the reverse.

Resources

The Scottish Socialist Party, which has 3000 members, more than 80 branches and six MPs produces a weekly newspaper — of 12 pages. Leaving aside the content of *Scottish Socialist Voice* for the moment, surely this should give us pause for thought.

A 24-page weekly paper would cost in the region of a quarter of a million dollars a year to produce, on my rough calculations (*Socialist Worker*, with 12 or 16 pages every three weeks, costs about \$60,000).

Writing, editing, distributing and selling such a paper is a massive affair, as DSP members would attest. DSP members are expected to contribute not just funds but between two and eight hours a week each in selling time to make *Green Left Weekly* viable.

SA, which is not a democratic centralist party, cannot place any such demands on its members. In reality, many members would be unlikely to sell an Alliance paper at all,

When capacity is there for weekly editorial management, then the Alliance should consider the possibility of merger of the papers, if the DSP is willing to offer to do so with *GLW*. The ISO should consider its publication options, along with the other affiliates. The best way for the Alliance to maintain and benefit from the achievements of *GLW* should be considered at that point.

For the Alliance to take up *GLW* as its mouthpiece at this point would be to compromise the Alliance's development as a coherent political force and with its own perspective in its own right. It is also to compromise the independence of the Alliance, its most precious asset, because that is what enables us to continue to attract new activists and reinvigorate left activists who have not chosen to join any of the individual affiliates. ■

and many others would do so only occasionally on a stall or at a rally.

The reality is that a 24-page weekly would heavily distort the work of the Alliance. Sustaining it would take up a very substantial amount of activists' time and energy. It simply does not square with an Alliance with fewer than 1000 financial members and a skeletal national apparatus.

In a year when the federal election will take centre stage, the Alliance needs to focus its energies and resources and establishing itself as a small but viable alternative. Taking on the huge task of producing a 24-page weekly will hinder, not help, that process.

Politics

Even if the resources were available, the bigger questions yet are: what kind of paper does the Alliance need, who is its audience and how can we construct a broad and sustainable editorial team?

Greg Adler, of the affiliate Workers League, has circulated a proposal [to the SA national executive] for a 20-page monthly paper. More importantly, he has outlined what the contents of such a paper should be.

I don't agree with all Greg's proposals, but his submission has one important quality that I heartily endorse — it attempts to construct a paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance. In other words, it starts with how a paper should be constructed politically.

There are the sorts of questions we should be debating.

Should the paper be a party paper (like *Scottish Socialist Voice*) which carries only the democratically agreed positions of the SA — or should it be a paper which carries debate between affiliates and individuals about the questions that divide us?

Should it attempt to agitate or should it be more reflective?

What should it be called, and why?

What is the balance in its coverage between Australian and overseas content? How does it handle dissent?

How can we construct a stable editorial board that is broader than the existing main affiliates? Or is that aim itself utopian at the moment?

My point is not to answer these questions. It is that the process adopted by the majority of the national executive effectively ignores them. The decision to rush towards a weekly paper has been taken with not one of these kind of problems being named, let alone solved.

The SA editorial board — assuming sufficient competent volunteers come forward — will not begin work its until mid-January at the earliest. Conference is on May 8 and 9 — some 15 weeks later.

At best we will know by May that we have a group of comrades who can co-ordinate reports on Alliance activities for *Green Left Weekly*.

Comrades on the NE say that the process is just a trial. But it is a trial based on a policy that presupposes that the Alliance is poised to take on political responsibility for the entire paper.

No free lunches

But, some will say, there is a way out of this bind. The DSP already produces a 24-page weekly and it is willing to put its resources at the Alliance's disposal.

The problem is that adopting *Green Left Weekly* as the SA paper — especially given the paucity of debate on the question — means adopting both its strengths *and* its weaknesses.

GLW is identified as the paper of the DSP. It has a history of pushing certain positions. That's fine — except if the Alliance "takes over" the paper, it will be seen as taking over that heritage.

None of the affiliates want the Alliance to be its front organisation. We are all committed to building something that is greater than the sum of its parts. But adopting *GLW*

sends a message to every cynic that the Alliance is little more than a mouthpiece for the DSP.

It doesn't matter how wrong that is. The idea will stick.

The bottom line is that the Alliance cannot simply pick up an existing paper at zero political cost. It has to develop one organically, one that every member of the Alliance can read, write for, sell and defend with confidence.

How to go forward?

I am not arguing for us to sit on our hands. My alternate motion was not an attempt to derail progress. I argued for two things — a working party to look at the kind of questions I have raised here. It could begin its work immediately. Second, the Alliance could take up *GLW*'s offer of more space for reports and articles by Alliance members.

The method I am advocating is hardly revolutionary. It is exactly what the Alliance decided to do in launching our new magazine, *Seeing Red*.

Last national conference did not proclaim a magazine from on high. It encouraged a process of debate and discussion on what kind of magazine, for what audience, with what content, name, editorial board, etc.

Only when those questions had been discussed and answered did the editors request articles for the first issue.

The NE majority say that the Alliance needs a paper, one is on offer, and so we should take it. This is a recipe for either crashing the process on the rocks of reality — people, money, political differences, etc — or of lumbering the Alliance with a paper many activists will be cautious to support.

Let us pause for a moment, take a small breath and begin the process politically. It might take a little longer to get there, but we will do it together. ■

Against the USA and the resistance

By Toma Hamid (Worker Communist Party of Iraq)

The allegation that the Worker-communist Party of Iraq is not against the USA is wrong. I hope comrades will not continue to spread such false propaganda among the members of the SA. The WCPI is absolutely against the USA and we believe she is the source of all problems and must leave Iraq.

However we are absolutely against what many people called the armed resistance in Iraq. We will definitely stay against those behind this armed resistance. Being against the so-called resistance does not mean supporting the USA. Let comrades be clear and not willing or unwilling create illusion.

The problem is the stand from the armed resistance and this is an old debate. Similar debate was going on in 1990s. The WCPI was against the USA and Saddam's regime in the same time while part of the left in Australia thought we should support a criminal regime like Saddam's. In one meeting held in 1998 the atmosphere was so hostile to me because I spoke against Saddam's regime that I had to leave the meeting.

This argument comes because some in the Left here do not see the societies in Third World as class societies but as featureless folk, and see that their task is to fight and harass imperialism. Their stand is: why we should care who is leading the fight against the USA — whether is a communist or extremely reactionary and criminal?. The important thing is who is able to harass the Western imperialism more.

Back to the resistance. I do not think it is not clear that people who are behind it are the Baathists and Islamic groups like al-Qaeda. It is very clear they are criminals. The issue is whether we support these criminals or not.

Probably someone living in Australia may believe those who portray this resistance as being anything apart from criminal, but this is not the case in Iraq or the Iraq community in Australia.

Is it a popular movement? I found an article published in *Green Left Weekly* that was trying to say that this is a popular movement and has a lot of support from the people in Iraq, but this is far from being true.

The only thing which is making this resistance effective is the nature of their deeds and the method of their struggle. It is easy to destroy infrastructure and kill civilians especially if people are stupid, despaired and brain washed enough to kill themselves.

Despite growing sentiments against the USA occupation, the people in Iraq do not want those behind the resistance. If anything there are large numbers of people who are not getting involved in armed struggle because of those who are now behind the resistance.

The resistance itself is not making the arguments that some comrades are making on its behalf. They are killing, destroying and terrorizing people. They do not claim they are fighting the USA because it has an imperialist role in Iraq.

Adding such dimensions to this resistance is dangerous. The Baathists in Saddam's oppressive apparatus who had murdered hundreds of thousands of Iraqis are hurt by the fall of the regime and are trying to return to power by making the USA's job difficult and forcing it to leave. They are doing their best to achieve this by destroying infrastructure, killing civilians and spreading fear, and also by killing the USA soldiers.

These criminals are the bulk of the resistance but there is also Islamic organisations, mainly al-Qaeda, involved in it. If these people succeed in their task it will be disastrous for the people in Iraq and the region.

WCPI is arguing that we can resist and fight the USA without supporting fascists, racists and criminals. It is saying we must build an independent resistance against the USA and we should lead the resistance of the working class.

It is saying that resistance in Iraq can be a bourgeois resistance or a working-class resistance. Now there are both kinds of resistance going on and the progressive people worldwide should support the working class's resistance.

Should the working-class struggle be a political or a military struggle? We can all debate that. However some comrades are saying no, we should support criminals and fascists but only after naming them "resistance".

I ask those who support the resistance: would you be happy to live in Baghdad when they (the Baathist and

Islamists like al-Qaeda) are in power? I am sure the answer will be no, but why do the same people want an Iraqi to be happy to live under these beasts' rule and, more than that, to sacrifice for their cause? The answer is that the Iraqis are not human beings in the eyes of these comrades, but religious and backward creatures who are doomed to life under such regimes.

By supporting this resistance the Western left is lending best services to the USA. The USA can only be good in comparison with these criminals and fascists. It is because of these beasts that the USA is becoming the defender of civilisation and humanity in the eyes of ordinary people in the West. Siding with reactionaries like Baathists and Islamists is an important reason why many people who are not happy with the policies of the USA are not going to the Left.

Taking a clear stand against both poles of this reactionary war will be the best fight against the USA.

Not surprisingly, we have no problem explaining to the ordinary people in the West that both poles of this war are reactionaries and terrorists, but we are always having problems with some in the Left convincing them that we should not support criminals like Khomeini, Saddam, Osama bin Laden, Taliban, Hibollah, Jihad and others. We are having difficulty explaining that people of poor countries are not sheep but human beings who want better life, that their societies are class societies and the right wing is the same being in the USA or Iraq. We have problems explaining that the Left in these countries is struggling for socialism and to do so it needs to stand against our own bourgeois class. We having problems explaining that there is nothing socialist in supporting criminals.

I am sure that this argument will go on for years, but what is important for me is that no one claims that the WCPI is not against the USA. Also I want here to remind the comrades that you are responsible for your stands and if tomorrow this same resistance makes an agreement with USA and then massacres the Left and all progressive people in Iraq, you have to take some responsibility. ■

Democracy and dissent in Cuba

By Kim Bullimore (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

In the last couple of months there have been a number of contributions to *Alliance Voices* on Cuba. I will not be taking up the nature and mechanics of the Cuban road to socialism, other than to make clear my view that the current Cuban government is revolutionary and that the people of Cuba are engaged in bringing about a socialist revolution. Instead, I will concentrate on the issues of democracy and dissent in Cuba, in particular the recent arrests of 75 so-called dissidents by the Cuban authorities. This contribution is therefore in part a reply to Bryan Sketchley's contribution, "Democratic Rights in Cuba", in Volume 3, Number 7 of *Alliance Voices*.

Bryan Sketchley wrote: "Workers Liberty views the recent arrests and detention of oppositional figures in Cuba

as an inevitable consequence of an anti-pluralist one-party state, that has nothing in common with our view of socialism, a socialism which allows and encourages wide-ranging debate and participation in the organisation of society". His article includes the Statement by Campaign for Peace and Democracy authored by Joanne Landy, a supporter of the invasion of Afghanistan and a member of the Council for Foreign Relations, one of the major institutions advising the U.S. government on imperialist policy for over half a century.

Bryan Sketchley continues: "Workers Liberty has signed and circulated [the Statement by the Campaign for Peace and Democracy which condemned the arrest of the 75 paid mercenaries by the Cuban government] ... And has also

considered moving a motion condemning the actions of the Castroists, at the national conference of the Socialist Alliance. On reflection, we decided against such a move until the Alliance has had time to discuss the issues in a full and extensive measure”.

The aim of this article is to contribute to that discussion and to the understanding of democracy and dissent in Cuba.

Bourgeois versus socialist democracy

Before discussing the democratic nature of Cuban society, it is necessary to define what socialists mean by democracy. As Bryan Sketchley points out, democracy for socialists is one which allows and encourages wide-ranging debate and participation in the organisation of society. Socialist democracy is one which looks to fulfil the needs of the majority of citizens, while at the same time raising their confidence, consciousness and their conviction to proceed towards socialism, increasing their active support through participation in the administration of their own state.

However, as socialists we also recognise that all the norms of workers’ democracy may not be realisable under every circumstance. Under conditions of civil war or foreign economic and military intervention which are a result of the capitalist class attempting to reassert its dominance and overthrow workers’ power, what could be termed “rules of war” apply. These may entail restrictions on the rights of counter-revolutionary forces — it would be utopian foolishness to believe that full rights should be granted to those who actively engage in acts of war to undermine and overthrow workers’ power.

In bourgeois circles, “democracy” is marked by an adherence to form rather than content. The term “democracy” is often accompanied by clichés and labels such as “one-party rule” and “multi-party system”, and rarely focuses on the content of the given political system. As a result, “democracy” has become a shop-worn phrase devoid of any serious reflection.

Socialists, on the other hand, when assessing whether a system is democratic or not, look to the content of that system rather than blindly accepting such clichés and labels. In making such an assessment, socialists need, first and foremost, to ask themselves who does the system serve? Does it serve the wealthy minority or does it serve the majority of citizens?

Cuban ‘democracy’ pre-1959

Democracy supposedly existed in Cuba from 1902 to 1958. Even under the brutal regime of US-backed dictator Fulgencio Batista, a multi-party electoral system existed.

But all of the elections during these 56 years were marked by corruption, fraud, harassment, and candidate assassination attempts — sometimes successful. They were also marked by various US administrations intervening actively to assure the election of puppet governments which would serve the USA’s economic and political needs. In this multi-party electoral system, the majority of Cubans did not get to participate in the political process. They were disenfranchised by severe poverty and their legal economic and social exploitation. Racism, sexism and crime were rife.

In today’s “one-party system” in Cuba, there not only exists a guarantee of formal democracy (the rule of the

people) in the form of a free, fair and secret ballot every 5 years, but there also exists a real political pluralism in which the overwhelming majority of Cubans participate.

The origins of revolutionary democracy in Cuba

In 1953, during his Moncada Barracks trial, Fidel Castro stated in his famous defense speech titled “History will Absolve Me” that, “The legitimate Constitution [of the Cuban people] is that which emanates directly from the sovereign people”.

He went onto proclaim five revolutionary laws. The first of these was the return of power to the people. The other four outlined the expropriation and redistribution of land to the poor, the right of workers to share in profits of large industrial, mercantile and mining enterprises, and the confiscation of holdings and profits to subsidise hospitals, education and workers’ funds (Castro, 1967, pp42 — 44).

As K.S. Karol points out in the introduction to the 1967 Cape edition of *History Will Absolve Me*, the fight to realise and exceed this program was and continues to meet with fierce opposition from the USA and its proteges in Cuba. The choice for Castro and the revolution, states Karol, was either a Cuba under the tutelage of the USA or a socialist Cuba. “The second choice was the only possible one”.

The July 26 Movement and Democracy

Even before taking state power on behalf of the Cuban people in January 1959, the July 26 Movement (J26M) began to implement democratic reforms. In what became known as the *Territorio Libre de Cuba* (liberated areas), the J26M assisted in the establishment of new laws and the building of new economic and socio-political structures to replace the old ones (August, 1999, p164). The *Territorio Libre de Cuba* were primarily located around Santiago de Cuba and in the west of Oriente province and in some areas constituted 12,000 square kilometers and comprised around a half a million people. In these areas, Batista’s army was replaced by a People’s Army which comprised and had the support of around 50,000 *Guajiros* or poor, illiterate, black, white and mulatto peasants who lived in the villages and farms of the Sierra Maestra (Hampsey, 2002, online; Blackburn, 1980, online).

With the help of this People’s Army, the J26M began to implement economic, social and political reforms in the liberated zones which opened the door for transformation towards real democratic structures which benefited the majority of people (August, 1999, pp165 -168).

For example, in 1957, in El Hombrito in the Sierra Maestra, the J26M aided in the construction of hospitals, farms and factories, as well as establishing a small newspaper and radio network (Hampsey, 2002, online). In another liberated zone, a decree adopted on September 25, 1958, called the *Administracion Civil de los Territorios Liberados* ensured the economic, social and other rights of citizens and saw the establishment of worker and peasant councils to work out the orientation and stimulation of industry, farming and road improvements, as well as the construction of offices and schools (August, 1999, 165). The work in these zones developed to such an extent that workers

and peasants congresses also took place (August, 1999, p165).

In addition to winning the Guajiros to the Rebel Army, the J26M established alliances with other anti-Batista forces. In September 1956, just before the departure of leading members of the J26M to Cuba, Castro and José Antonio Echevarría, the leader of the University Federation of Students (FEU) signed the Mexico pact that united the revolutionary efforts of the two organisations. Point 16 of the pact read: “The FEU and the 26th of July movement adopt as their watchword the unity of all the revolutionary, moral, and civic forces of the nation — students, workers, youth organizations, and all men of dignity — so that they will support us in this struggle which will end in our victory or our death” (Hampsey, 2002, online).

Castro and the J26M went on to establish a similar alliance with Frank País and other leaders of the Urban Underground movement, which was made up of urban professionals and workers. The Urban Underground was primarily located Santiago de Cuba, Havana and a number of other cities in Cuba. By the time of the 1959 revolution it is estimated to have numbered well over 20,000 workers (Sweig, 2002).

These alliances with anti-Batista forces, along with the J26M’s work in the liberated areas, were modest efforts, but of enormous importance. They brought into real life the notion that there is no such thing as abstract democracy. Democracy was, as Fidel Castro had pronounced in 1953, one which served the interests of a nation composed of a sovereign people.

Democracy after 1959

Since 1959, democracy in Cuba has not been defined by focusing on a specific type of electoral process or certain features of the political process, such as the number of parties in existence. Instead it has been defined and measured by the Cuban people as something which is first and foremost about the elimination of poverty and the establishment of equality for all people, the right to free, universal medical care and education, the right to adequate food and shelter, as well as the full and active participation of all citizens in the economic, social and political landscape of Cuban society.

As both Raul and Fidel Castro have pointed out, Cuban democracy has very little to do with bourgeois democracy. Instead, “we think in terms of workers’ democracy, of proletarian democracy, in which the rights of the exploiting classes have been effectively suppressed, as well as those of imperialism” (Harnecker, 1980, pp xxxi -xxxii).

Between January and September 1959, around 1500 decrees and laws were enacted resulting in urban rent being reduced by 30-50%, electricity and telephone rates being cut, wages being increased by 15%, legal discrimination against blacks being abolished, the unemployed receiving jobs, the implementation of a literacy program for all Cubans, and agrarian reform resulting in the redistribution of land to poor farmers and workers (August, 1999).

While a huge number of democratic reforms were implemented in the first 10 year of the revolution, empowering and activating the Cuban masses in political, economic and social life, elections were not held until 1974.

In the early years of the revolution, the experience of “American style democracy” weighed heavily in the memory of the Cuban people, so much so that when Castro or other revolutionary leaders spoke at mass rallies and meetings around the country about scheduling elections they were booed (August, 1999, p184). August points out, “In the minds of the people, elections were associated with the neo-colonial regime’s multi-party system or the even more fraudulent elections held under the open dictatorship” (1999, p185).

This sentiment is clearly revealed in the thousands of interviews conducted by Marta Harnecker for her book *Cuba: Dictatorship or Democracy*. As one interviewee, whose husband had been imprisoned by Batista, states: “The word democracy still gives me shivers. It is as though they asked you: ‘do you like a fence?’ For me, through association of ideas, a fence is not, say a beautiful Spanish, wrought-iron fence, but a fence that means prison. That is the way it is imprinted on my mind.”

Democracy in the first 10 years of the revolution instead was based on people’s participation in the mass organisations — such as the Committees in Defence of the Revolution (CDR), the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), the Union of Communist Youth (UJC) and the Central Organisation of Cuban Workers (CTC) — as well as mass referenda (mass rallies of between 1 and 1.5 million people).

Membership of the mass organisations was and continues to be voluntary and independent of the Cuban Communist Party. For example, the Federation of Cuban Women, established in 1960, today has a membership of over 3.5 million women, or 80% of Cuban women over 14 years old. The UJC, founded in 1962, today has a membership of over 500,000 young people. The CTC, the umbrella organisation for workers’ unions, has a voluntary membership of around 3.5 million.

Sugar, the labour movement and democracy

In 1970, in the wake of the failed sugar harvest (the harvest fell short by 1.4 million tonne), the Cuban government, along with the trade unions, worked to revitalise the labour movement in Cuba. The focus on the sugar harvest had meant that there had been a fall in production in other sectors of the economy (Logan, 1979, p59).

The campaign aimed to revitalise workers involvement in the unions, making sure that their feelings and opinions were felt. In 1971 alone, 5,595 meetings were held at local work centres to discuss workers’ problems and complaints (Cannon, 1983, p222). New elections were held with 152,274 workers being elected to leadership roles within their local unions. These workers were elected from a total of 279,372 candidates, whose candidacy had been discussed at more than 30,000 nominating meetings (August, 1999, p208). Of those workers elected, only 27% had been local union leaders previously.

The revitalisation of the labour movement and union elections was also important because it lay some groundwork for elections on a state level by helping the Cuban people see that it was possible to hold elections which served the people.

Experiment in Matanzas

In the early 1970's, the revolutionary government announced its intention to reintroduce elections in Cuba. The process was to be put into the hands of the masses so that, as Castro argued, "the revolutionary process may become a formidable school of government in which millions will learn to take on responsibilities and resolve the problems of government" (Cockburn, 1979, p18).

In October 1974, a draft Constitution which established a provision for elected assemblies as the supreme authority in the country was presented to the people of Cuba for consideration. It was discussed article by article in the mass organisations, in workplaces, schools, universities and even in units of the armed forces for a year, until September 1975 (Cockburn, 1979, p19).

Six and a quarter million votes were cast at these meetings (approximately the entire adult population of Cuba), with 5.5 million votes in favour of the Constitution in its published form and 16,000 voters proposing modifications and additions (Cockburn, 1979, p20). These modifications, additions and proposals were reported publicly, with many of them adopted by vote.

During this year of consultation, a pilot form of the *Poder Popular* (People Power Assemblies) was established in Matanzas Province. The province was divided into municipalities, nomination committees were set up and elections took place (Cockburn, 1979, p24-25). The Matanzas elections resulted in 1014 candidates being elected to 18 municipal assemblies. Of those elected, only 46% were members of the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and 13% were members of the Young Communist League (Cockburn, 1979, p26).

Neither Bayonets or Guns

In 1976, the first nationwide elections since the revolution took place. These elections were remarkable because, as Fidel Castro pointed out, "for the first time elections have been held in Cuba with neither bayonets or guns at the school gates" (Harnecker, 1980, p72).

Poder Popular provided for 169 Municipal Assemblies, 14 Provincial Assemblies and a National Assembly of People's Power. Elections take place over a 9-month period and the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) plays no formal role in the elections (that is, no candidates are nominated or recommended by the PCC) (August, 1999). Nominations are overseen by a candidacy commission made up of elected delegates from the mass organisations.

In 1992, recognising a number of shortcomings within the People's Power model, the Cuban Communist Party initiated discussion amongst the people to introduce two major reforms to the electoral system — the introduction of direct election of candidates to municipal, provincial and national assemblies, and changes to the way the candidacy commissions were run (Reed, 1992, p112-116).

Before 1992, delegates to the National Assembly were elected by the Municipal Assemblies. Since then candidates for the Provincial and National Assemblies have been elected through direct election (Reed, 1992, p112). Delegates now need to win the majority of a vote by citizens in secret and free ballots in their respective constituencies and districts before they can take up a position in either the relevant assembly.

The other major reform made to the electoral system was that the candidacy commissions, previously chaired by a member of the Cuban Communist Party, have, since 1992, been presided over by a delegate elected from the trade unions (August, 1999, p226). August states:

"These reforms were no small matter. For example ... prestigious leaders such as Fidel Castro have to win the approval of at least 50% of the population in his district through a secret vote in order to become a deputy [delegate] and thus fill the position as president of the Council of State. In compliance with the ...[candidacy commission] ... reform, all candidates proposed to stand for elections as deputies of the National Assembly and delegates to the provincial assemblies have to be submitted to even more rigorous scrutiny by the citizens before they are elected as candidates. The composition of the candidacy commission, now led by the trade union representatives, have increase the power of the masses of the peoples" (1999, p226).

Candidacy commissions are required to consult with as many people as possible during the nomination process. In 1997, there were 60,000 nominations made and over 1.6 million people involved in the consultation process (August, 1999, p311-312). The candidacy commission then makes a list of the 300 most nominated people and resubmits it for consultation in the workplaces, universities, schools, neighbourhoods and mass organisations. All candidates must get over 50% of the vote to be elected to the Municipal, Provincial and National Assemblies.

Anyone aged 16 years or over can vote or be nominated as a candidate to the Assemblies. Elected delegates are not required to be a member of the (PCC). In 1998 elections, only around 40% of the delegates elected to three assemblies were members of the party.

All elected delegates are subject to recall and most do not receive a wage, instead continuing to work in their original job. Those delegates who do receive a wage get the equivalent of an average worker's wage (August, 1999). There are no material privileges in becoming a delegate.

Constituencies in Cuba are deliberately kept small, usually less than a 1000 people, so that representatives are able to become reasonably well known by all their electors. The only form of advertising allowed for nominated candidates is a biographical sheet which includes a photo and lists their name, address, level of education, occupation, community activities, etc (August, 1999; Reed, 1992, p112). This sheet is displayed at the local shopping centre and other public places. Candidate meetings are held (usually for two months) so that all candidates can speak with community members.

Municipal Assemblies, which are elected by secret ballot every two and half years, have responsibility for overseeing businesses, transportation, schools, building repairs and construction within their jurisdiction (Reed, 1992, p112).

Provincial Assemblies oversee issues in a larger geographical areas, such as roads, child-care, education, health, etc.

The National Assembly is made up of 601 delegates and has permanent working bodies which meet daily and weekly (all are open to public attendance). In 1998, 65% of the deputies elected to the National Assembly were first-time

delegates and only 64 of the 601 delegates elected were members of the PCC or the Communist Youth (August, 1999, p366).

One of the duties of the National Assembly is to elect the 31-member Council of State. The members of the Assembly prepare their own candidacy lists and submit them anonymously. In 1998, 356 proposals were submitted (August, 1999, p369). The list of proposals are then collated and a list of the 31 most-nominated candidates is compiled. This list is then presented to the entire National Assembly. To be elected to the Council, each candidate must receive 50% or more of the vote. In 1998, 45% of the Council of State became members of it for the first time (August, 1999, p373).

Opposition Candidates

Much is made by liberals and some socialists of the supposed fact that no opposition candidates can stand or be elected in Cuba. This is incorrect. As August points out, amongst those who have no understanding of how the Cuban electoral system works, a “prejudice exists to the effect that in an electoral process where there is no more than one candidate for any one post, the system is not democratic” (1999, p315). However, August goes on to say that “this preconception eliminates the significance of the Cuban nomination procedure ... democracy in Cuba and its electoral process allows plenty of opportunity for citizens to oppose anything which does not coincide with the interest the people” (1999, p316).

No “opposition” candidate is forbidden to stand; anyone can be nominated by members of their local community. As well, the law forbids the PCC to nominate, stand or recommend candidates on behalf of the party. Instead, all candidates stand and are elected on their individual merit. “Opposition” candidates, like all other candidates, are judged on their merits. If they were indeed popular, the nomination procedure would ensure that they were short listed (1999, p274). One does not have a right to be elected just because they have an “opposition” position. They must first win public support.

Rene González Schwerert, one of the Cuban 5 who have been jailed by the US government, explains in his letter to Joanne Landy, author of the Statement for the Campaign for Peace and Democracy, that these so-called dissidents have:

“... all the right to express their opinions in Cuba. All they have to do is to stand up at a nomination meeting and explain to their neighbours that they want to take the country back to 1959, return the Cuban land to the United Fruit Company, recall the terrorists that now live in Miami to the island and give them their properties back, sell the country to the transnationals and become themselves the political class who will take care of all those people’s petty interests. If their neighbours agree with them they will be nominated, nothing would happen to them for looking stupid while expressing their political platform in front of the electorate.

“But if they run into a revolutionary constituency — and their neighbours are committed to their country and support the government of the people, for the people and by the people; and having fought and died for their society, don’t want to betray the memory of the patriots who have given

their lives for the sovereignty and independence of Cuba — no ‘dissident’ will be nominated nor will he obtain any vote.

“And if they don’t deserve the confidence of their people, they don’t have the right to go to the American embassy — the last place I would think of as a haven for democracy — to find a source of sovereignty that only lies in the Cubans” (González, 2003, online).

The role of the Cuban Communist Party

While the PCC plays no formal role in regard to electoral democracy in Cuba, they do play a leading role in Cuban society. In May 1973, Raul Castro outlined in a speech to the PCC’s Central Committee the role of both the party and the state in regard to Cuban society:

“The power of the party rests directly on its moral authority; in the influence that it has among the masses; in the clarity with which it expresses its interests and aspirations; in the consciousness that it imbues in them in their revolutionary, economic, and social duties; and finally in the confidence that the masses put in it... [while] the power of the state rests directly in its material authority, having at its disposal a special force to make the fulfillment of its decision compulsory; to subject everyone to its juridical norms” (1983, p150).

The party leads the state, but is not the state, it cannot and should not substitute for it, argues Raul Castro. He elaborates that it is the job of party members, whatever position they occupy in Cuban society, to carry out the party’s decisions and “to convince those who are not members of the correctness of these decisions and the necessity of carrying them out” (1983, p151). The leading position of the party, argues Raul Castro:

“...is conquered and maintained through struggle. This position is based on being the vanguard of the most advanced social class of society and acting as such: as the most faithful and determined representative of the interests of all the working masses. It’s authority is not based on force nor on the possibility of using coercion and violence to impose its will and its directives. Rather its is supported in the confidence and the support that it receives, first of all, from the class that it represents, and secondly, from the rest of the working population. This confidence and support are won through a correct and rational policy, through the party’s links with the masses, using as its methods persuasion and convincing, and upheld by force of example and correctness of its policy” (1983, p153).

The PCC’s links with the mass organisations are essential. As Lenin wrote in December 1920: “[The dictatorship of the proletariat] cannot work without a number of ‘transmission belts’ running from the vanguard to the mass of the advanced class, and from the latter to the mass of the working people”. The primary task of the Communist party, he argues, is to keep in touch with and establish contact with the masses through mass organisations such as the trade unions, and win their membership over to socialism (Lenin, 1965, online).

PCC members make up only a small percentage of all those involved in the mass organisations in Cuba. Like socialists in Australia and around the world, they are part of the vanguard of the class and thus must work to convince and win over the rest of their class through example and

correctness of policy. Thus the PCC sees its role as being the main leading force within all the mechanisms or institutions which help direct, but do not control, the Cuban path towards socialism.

Dissidents or paid mercenaries?

On March 18 2003, Cuban authorities began the arrest of 75 so-called dissidents. They were charged under various articles of the Cuban penal code and subsequently sentenced to between 15 and 27 years' imprisonment.

Article 5.1 of the penal code states that any Cuban citizen "who seeks out information to be used in the application of the Helms-Burton Act, the blockade and the economic war against our people aimed at disrupting internal order, destabilising the country and liquidating the socialist state and the independence of Cuba, shall incur a sanction of deprivation of liberty" (Perez, 2003, p31).

Article 6.1 states that any Cuban citizen "who gathers, reproduces, disseminates subversive material from the government of the United States of America, its agencies, representative bodies, officials or any foreign entity to support the objectives of the Helms-Burton Act, the blockade and the war, shall incur a sanction of deprivation of liberty" (Perez, 2003, p31).

Others were charged under Article 91 of the penal code, which states that any Cuban citizen "who executes an action in the interest of a foreign state with the purpose of harming the independence of the Cuban State or the integrity of its territory shall incur a sentence of 10 to 20 years of deprivation of liberty or death" (Perez, 2003, p30).

Far from being "independent" journalists, unionists or librarians, or genuine dissidents, those arrested and jailed were in fact mercenaries paid by the US government. On April 9, Cuba's Foreign Minister, Felipe Perez Roque, presented to an international press conference vouchers, bank receipts and photos of "dissidents" meeting with James Cason, the head of the US Interest Section, demonstrating that the so-called dissidents had been working hand in hand with the US Interest Section (Roque, 2003).

At the media conference, Roque cited extensive examples of so-called "independent" agencies receiving upwards of \$3.5 million from US government sources. Most of the monies paid to the mercenaries was channeled via the head of the US Interests Section, James Cason, as well as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the Agency for International Development (AID), the two principal US federal agencies implementing US grants and loans in pursuit of US foreign policy (Petras, 2003, online; Agee, 2003, online).

Under US AID's Cuba Program (resulting from the 1996 Helms-Burton Act) more than \$8.5 million has been channeled since 1997 to Cuban opponents of the Castro regime to publish, meet and propagandise for the overthrow of the Cuban government, in coordination with a variety of US NGO's, universities, foundations and other front groups (Petras, 2003, online). According to James Petras, the criteria for US AID's direct funding of dissidents is clearly stated: "The recipients of payments and grants must have demonstrated a clear commitment to U.S. directed 'regime change' toward 'free markets' and 'democracy' — no doubt similar to the U.S. colonial dictatorship in Iraq".

Phillip Agee, a former CIA operative in Latin America from 1958 to 1968, similarly points out that both "anti-Castro" organisations in the USA and those they sponsor in Cuba are not independent, but are vetted by the US government and "receive prior approval through an investigative process, and each person has clearly defined tasks" (Agee, 2003, online). According to Agee, each "dissident" is "fully identified with assigned tasks in the [US] AID, NED or CIA project documentation covering the activity, probably in a classified annex, whether they are categorized as human rights activists, independent journalists, independent librarians, or distributors of information materials" (Agee, 2003, online).

Agee goes onto state: "Whatever the amounts of money reaching Cuba may have been, everyone in Cuba working in the various dissident projects knows of U.S. government sponsorship and funding and of the purpose: regime change. Far from being 'independent' journalists, 'idealistic' human rights activists, 'legitimate' advocates for change, or 'Marian librarians from River City', every one of the 75 arrested and convicted was knowingly a participant in U.S. government operations to overthrow the government and install a different, U.S.-favored, political, economic and social order.

"They knew what they were doing was illegal, they got caught, and they are paying the price. Anyone who thinks they are prisoners of conscience, persecuted for their ideas or speech, or victims of repression, simply fails to see them properly as instruments of a U.S. government that has declared revolutionary Cuba its enemy. They were not convicted for ideas but for paid actions on behalf of a foreign power that has waged a 44-year war of varying degrees of intensity against this country".

Executions

The hijacking of the Havana harbor ferry, the *Baraguá*, was the 7th hijacking in 7 months and came on April 2, a day before the trials of the "dissidents" were to start. This made it easy for Cuba's enemies, and not a few of its friends, to lump the two disparate events into one "wave of repression."

The ferry was a flat-bottomed, self-propelled barge with a cabin, safe only for calm harbour waters. It was carrying 50 people, including children and foreign tourists. The hijackers armed with guns and knives took it to sea in a highly dangerous force 4 wind, ran it out of fuel, and threatened by radio to start throwing hostages overboard if they were not given enough fuel to reach Florida.

The Cuban coast guard convinced the hijackers to allow a tow of the drifting ferry to the port of Mariel where special forces set up a trap and divers prepared for the rescue. After many hours of standoff, it all ended in less than a minute when a French woman suddenly dove overboard and was followed en masse by the other hostages, and the hijackers as well. The hostages were all rescued, and the hijackers quickly arrested.

In the trial the state asked for, and received, the death penalty for the three ringleaders of the hijacking. This was upheld by an appeals court because, even though no one was injured, it was a terrorist act of extreme gravity. It was up to the Council of State to ratify or commute sentence. In the end, the Council of State decided to ratify the court decision, ending a nearly three-year moratorium on executions.

According to Agee, the primary reason for this was that Cuban security forces were investigating another 29 hijackings plots, all of which were being encouraged both directly and indirectly by the US government (Agee, 2003, online). The Council of State also feared that:

if they did not send a strong message against hijacking and terrorism, innocent people would be killed — as happened during similar US-encouraged hijackings in the 1960s.

the US would use the hijackings as a pretext to escalate its military campaign against Cuba. This was borne out on April 25 when the chief of the Cuba Bureau of the State Department told the Chief of Cuba's Interests Section in Washington that the US considered any more hijackings to be a serious threat to US national security (Agee, 2003, online).

Fair trial or kangaroo court?

The Cuban authorities have also come under criticism regarding whether or not due process was carried out in the trials of the 75 mercenaries and hijackers. Foreign Minister Roque, in his international press conference, showcased evidence used in the trials of the mercenaries, as well as video footage of testimony of both those on trial and those who testified against them. He pointed out that in the 29 trials which took place (some trials had multiple defendants) 54 lawyers participated, 44 of whom were chosen by the defendants with 10 appointed as public defenders by the courts (several lawyers represented more than one client).

Defendants were free to testify in court, and introduce evidence and call witnesses in their favour (Perez, 2003, p25). In addition, around 3000 observers attended the trials — on average 100 per trial, many being relatives of the defendants (Perez, 2003, p24-25).

Many of the star witnesses against the “dissidents” were other “dissidents” who were revealed to be Cuban Security Agents. The most notable was Nestor Bager, who had been undercover for 30 years and was one of the most trusted by the US government.

Video footage of his trial testimony reveals Bager declaring that not only were he and his fellow “dissidents” regularly instructed on what topics to cover in their writings, but they regularly received payment and gifts for doing so (Perez, 2003, p52). Bager, who was the president of the Independent Press Association, told the courts that he was so trusted by his US handlers that he had an “open access” pass to the US Interest Section which allowed him access to the facility and its equipment “any day, any time” (Perez, 2003, p52).

The USA's real reason for championing and fostering paid mercenaries in Cuba has been confirmed by Wayne Smith, a former head of the US Interest Section in an interview he gave in 2000. According to Smith: “We [the USA] aren't really interested in democracy and human rights. We just use those words to hide our true reasons. If democracy and human rights really mattered to us, Indonesia, Turkey, Mexico, Peru and Colombia — for example — would be our enemies. Cuba is a paradise compared to those countries and most countries in the world.

“Since 1985, we have stated publicly that we will encourage and openly finance dissident and human rights

group in Cuba; this, too, is in our interests. The United States isn't financing all of those groups — only the ones that are best known internationally. Those dissidents and human rights groups in Cuba — that are nothing but a few people — are only important to the extent that they serve us in a single cause: that of destabilising Fidel Castro's regime.

“Through those two policies — economic pressure and human rights — we want to force the overthrow of Fidel Castro and then install a transitional government that we like — to reinstate the people we want and, thus control Cuba once again” (Calvo and Declercq, 2000).

Conclusion

The democratic system in Cuba, while not perfect, is one which does strive to involve the majority of Cuban citizens. The Cuban revolutionary government has made mistakes in the past, and no doubt will make mistakes in the future. However, it has also demonstrated time and time again that it is willing to re-examine and reassess its policies in order to further democratise Cuban society and involve the mass of the Cuban people. As a result, Cuban society is marked by a political pluralism which involves, through the mass organisations, public consultation and elections, the majority of workers, women, students and farmers in widespread political debate and discussion.

As Fidel Castro has pointed out, “We call our system a democracy because, in the first place, it rests upon the entire people; second, because it offers full participation to the people, as has never happened before in any other type of human society; third, because there is an open and permanent debate, engaging the whole people in the enactment of all essential measures.... there is no fundamental law, no important measure, not discussed with the entire people” (Harnecker, 1980, pxxxii). ■

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Against the red scare in the Queensland AMWU

Statement from the Socialist Alliance National Conveners

Issued on November 19, 2003

For several weeks, the leadership of the AMWU Queensland branch ran a vicious red-baiting campaign against a reform team of AMWU members standing candidates for state and national conference delegate positions in the metal division. The slurs and lies also targeted other union activists and Socialist Alliance.

The reform group, Workers Unity, is made up of rank-and-file AMWU members, including two former AMWU organisers. The group's convenor is AMWU activist Brett Cardinal, a member of the Socialist Alliance Brisbane district committee.

There is usually very little campaigning in elections for conference delegates. In this election, however, the officials were worried that Brett Cardinal and some other members of Workers Unity would attract support because they have a long history as AMWU activists.

The officials sent a glossy leaflet to every AMWU member in Queensland titled "Beware the extremists trying to take over your union". They followed that up with two more leaflets smearing Workers Unity.

These leaflets made blatantly false statements in an attempt to denigrate Cardinal and Workers Unity, the Workers First group in Victoria, and Socialist Alliance. What they did *not* do is present any plans for defending members' interests.

In contrast, the Workers Unity leaflets did not make personal attacks on the officials and focused on what the union must do to become strong again.

The officials' leaflet, under the name Rank & File Defend the Union Committee, parodied Socialist Alliance, stating: "Both Workers First and Workers Unity are brand names for the Socialist Alliance which sees itself as the revolutionary front of Australian politics and is committed to creating a workers' paradise and a radical new society. Socialist Alliance is an umbrella group for a range of fringe groups ...".

The leaflet took advantage of the fact that most Queensland AMWU members would be unaware of what is happening in the union in Victoria. It is simply not true that

Workers First and Workers Unity are front groups for Socialist Alliance. Some members of Workers First are also members of Socialist Alliance, and one member of Workers Unity is a member of the Alliance.

It is also dishonest to imply that Socialist Alliance members control these groups — they make their decisions with the democratic input of all participants. However, Socialist Alliance members don't hide their views or their membership of the Alliance, unlike many AMWU national and Queensland officials who cover up the fact that they are members of the ALP.

Both Workers Unity and Workers First involve AMWU members with a wide range of views, but who are committed to the AMWU becoming a genuinely left and militant union again.

The officials' leaflet also stated: "Through their front group called Workers First, Socialist Alliance were the major influence in the AMWU Victorian branch from 1998 to 2002 and almost destroyed the union. During that time we saw:

- Violence, bullying and intimidation used as an industrial and political tactic
- A strike first, think later' approach to negotiations
- Long-standing members being threatened and assaulted because they did not agree with Socialist Alliance
- Union employees winning sexual harassment and unfair dismissal cases against Socialist Alliance members."

This statement is totally false, and if it was taken to court could be found libelous. The officials provided no evidence because the claims are false.

Workers First was established in 1997, four years before Socialist Alliance was formed. However, Workers First's key leader, Craig Johnston, who was elected AMWU state secretary, did join Socialist Alliance when it formed and encouraged other Workers First members to join and support Socialist Alliance.

No sexual harassment or unfair dismissal cases have been won against Workers First or Socialist Alliance members in the AMWU Victorian branch, or anywhere else.

There have been no incidents of Socialist Alliance or Worker First members using threats of violence against

people who disagree with them. In fact, some of the AMWU officials who weren't members of Workers First were pleasantly surprised that the Workers First leadership encouraged the expression of different views, unlike the national union leadership.

The allegation that Workers First had a "strike first, think later" approach is designed to disparage the successful campaigns that have been led by the Victorian branch, particularly in the metal division. Workers First led a successful pattern bargaining campaign in 2000, winning Victorian members the best wages and working conditions of manufacturing workers in the country. During this campaign,

the Workers First leadership was not scared of initiating industrial action.

The red-baiting campaign in Queensland reflects the iron grip that the ALP's national left faction has over the AMWU nationally. It is worried about the development of Socialist Alliance and the possibility that the Alliance will continue to join trade union activists, and perhaps lead unions.

Socialist Alliance proudly supported the Workers Unity ticket in Queensland because it stood candidates on a platform of defending workers' interests and building a democratic, fighting union. ■

Against the occupation of Iraq

[The following motion on Socialist Alliance's anti-occupation and solidarity work was adopted unanimously by the National Executive on November 14, 2003.]

That the national executive of the Socialist Alliance:

1) Reaffirms existing conference policy on Iraq. Opposing Australian imperialism is a duty for Australian socialists. Calling for an end to the occupation of Iraq and building the peace movement remains a central priority for the Socialist Alliance. The US-led occupation is the problem, not the solution.

2) Rejects any proposal to transfer responsibility for the occupation to the UN. UN troops would play the same role as the Americans and their allies. UN welfare agencies may have a role to play in the reconstruction of Iraq, but a decision on that is a matter for the Iraqi people.

3) Rejects as pitifully inadequate the \$17 million pledged by the Australian government at a recent conference in Madrid on the reconstruction of Iraq. Australia, as one of three illegal belligerents, should be paying reparations to the Iraqi people. Socialist Alliance will continue to raise slogans such as "Genuine aid not profiteering occupation".

4) Calls for a free and fair vote of all Iraqis for an interim authority as a first step towards establishing the democratic will of the Iraqi people.

5) Continues to give solidarity to the re-emerging workers' movement in Iraq.

6) The NE recognises that the question of whether or not SA should support the emerging resistance, including the military resistance, in Iraq needs discussion through the SA. The NE calls for full debate in the branches and Alliance Voices and, following that discussion, the NE will consider the question at its first meeting in 2004. ■

Socialist Alliance newspaper

[The following motion, put by John van der Velden, Louise Walker, Michael Morphett and Lisa Macdonald, was adopted by the National Executive — 14 for, 7 against, 1 abstention — on November 14, 2003.]

That National Executive provisionally accept the Democratic Socialist Party offer for Socialist Alliance to undertake an editorial role on *Green Left Weekly*. This role to encompass:

1. The formation of an SA editorial board committee to work in conjunction with the existing *GLW* board and report to National Conveners/National Executive as required.

2. That the role of the SA editorial board include securing access for SA members and affiliates, soliciting material and over sighting the public presentation of SA within *GLW*.

3. That this transitional arrangement with *GLW* be assessed at the next SA national conference [in May 2004] with a view to negotiating the integration of *GLW* and SA editorial committees and the transformation of *GLW* into the national weekly newspaper of SA.

That this provisional NE acceptance of the DSP offer and accompanying NE proposal be canvassed with SA branches

for immediate feedback by December 5, 2003, pending formal ratification at the NE meeting of December 12, 2003.

* * *

[The following counter-motion, put by David Glanz, was rejected by the National Executive — 7 for, 14 against, 1 abstention — at its meeting on November 14, 2003.]

The national executive of the Socialist Alliance:

1) Recognises that the 2003 conference voted for the Socialist Alliance to have "a common socialist voice ... in a national paper".

2) Recognises that to sustain a frequently published national paper is a major political and financial undertaking and believes that the Alliance is not yet capable of sustaining such a paper.

3) Believes that to take a "short cut" by adopting *Green Left Weekly* as the paper of the Socialist Alliance would severely distort the development of the Alliance, because:

a) The production, distribution and financing of a weekly paper would completely dominate the life of the Alliance to the detriment of other areas of work.

b) While *Green Left Weekly* has its admirers, it also has its critics. Its political “brand” is synonymous with a range of contentious positions (including, but not limited to, Australian troops into East Timor, defence of the Stalinist “revolution” in Afghanistan, free speech for Nazis and Pauline Hanson, largely uncritical support of the Cuban regime, etc).

5) Believes that the Socialist Alliance should take the same approach to developing a national paper as it has done towards developing the *Seeing Red* magazine.

The May conference decided to “produce a draft plan for the publication covering format, frequency, editorial board, name, funding and any other relevant issues”.

The provisional editorial board correctly addressed such additional and important questions as “who is the audience for this publication?” and “how can we ensure a broad base of writers?”.

6) Agrees:

a) To set up a working group to consider such questions in relation to a Socialist Alliance paper.

b) As an interim step, without prejudice to the working group’s report, to accept the DSP’s offer regarding *Green Left Weekly*, namely:

- an invitation to all Socialist Alliance members to contribute articles and report on their political activities in *Green Left Weekly*;
- agreement that the editorial of *Green Left Weekly* be written within the broad framework of Socialist Alliance positions while explicit Socialist Alliance positions be presented as such either in articles, columns or inserts;
- the right of conveners or editorial committee members to participate in editorial collective meetings, make proposals on content, and;
- agreement that any article that the Socialist Alliance conveners want published should be published. ■