

# Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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**PLEASE NOTE: The deadline for members to submit resolutions/motions to the National Conference is midnight on Friday, April 30. Please email them to the National Conveners at: [ne@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:ne@socialist-alliance.org). All resolutions/motions submitted will be published in Alliance Voices.**

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# **We need a more detailed queer rights policy before the next Federal election**

*By Alison Thorne (Wills branch)*

The lesbian, gay, bi and transgendered community is a distinct community with its own well developed media and other institutions. For example, in Melbourne we have *Melbourne Community Voice* published weekly and *The Star* and *B.NEWS* published alternate weeks. We have a monthly magazine, *Lesbiana*.

We also have BENT TV which broadcasts programs on Channel 31. We have a radio station which broadcasts to the queer community, JOY FM. Other stations, such as community radio 3CR also have a range of programs such as "Dykes on Mikes" and "In Ya Face". There are also many community newsletters.

During the last couple of Federal elections gay rights organisations have hosted candidate forums open to all parties willing to attend and outline their policies.

As a Socialist Alliance candidate for the Senate at the last Federal election with a strong track record as an activist within the lesbian and gay community I was able to get useful publicity for our campaign.

But while what we currently have to say on queer liberation gets to the nub of the issue, it is really bare bones.

Our current policy is:

- Repeal all laws that discriminate against lesbians and gay men; full equality for same sex couples.
- End all discrimination based on race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, age, disability, political ideology, employment status, sexuality and gender identity.

Last year the Freedom Socialist Party proposed the following policy draft to the conference. This draft, which has been lightly edited for grammar and clarity, was not discussed and was instead referred to branches and policy working groups for discussion as one or more delegates indicated they opposed something within it which, due to the process adopted, they were not able to elaborate on.

I am moving this policy for discussion at the 2004 National Conference because I believe the Alliance will benefit greatly. By adopting a more detailed policy we will enjoy greater coverage for our campaign within the queer community. This is not a policy discussion that should once again be put on the back burner and comrades have now had a full year to consider this proposal.

## **Full equality for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people**

We live in a society which attempts to dictate sexual preference and gender identity through the promoting of marriage and the nuclear family as the only legitimate model for relationships. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people suffer oppression because their lives are a direct threat to the nuclear family which is an economic cornerstone of capitalism. The Socialist Alliance opposes all attempts to shoehorn people into sexual and gender conformity. We believe it is a basic democratic right that a persons' self-definition of sexual preference and gender identity should be recognised. Heterosexism exists at almost every level in this society, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is entrenched in all of the key institutions of society - education, health, the law, the media, family, church and state. In government the Socialist Alliance will:

- Enact enforceable anti-discrimination legislation to protect lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, people living with HIV/AIDS and transgendered people; remove existing exemptions for private schools, insurance industry, tax system, superannuation etc; legislate for the right of transgendered people to be issued with passports, drivers licences and other documents specifying the gender of their choice.
- Extend to same sex relationships equal status with heterosexual defactos in superannuation, immigration, taxation, family law, industrial relations and any other laws and regulations; ensure the right of gays and lesbians to choose to marry if they so wish; provide independent incomes [Newstart, Pensions, etc] for all regardless of relationship status - this will end state-enforced economic dependency.
- Guarantee the right of gay men and lesbians to adopt or foster children and end discrimination against gay men and lesbians in child custody cases;
- Fully fund gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth programs including refuges and housing services, health services, coming out, self-esteem and suicide prevention programs;
- Support Pride Marches, the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, film and video festivals and other queer community events; defend and extend gay, lesbian and transgender programming on the ABC, SBS and community broadcasters; work vigorously for an end to the vicious and destructive portrayal of gay men, lesbians and transgender people in some sections of the media.
- Support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered workers; promote strong policies within unions to defend gay, lesbian and transgendered workers; support the establishment of gay and lesbian caucuses within trade unions.

# **Putting Gender Agenda into action: employer funded paid maternity leave is a key priority for SA in this election year**

*By Alison Thorne (Wills branch) and Brigitte Ellery (Geelong branch)*

The competition between the ALP and the Howard Government for the votes of parents is well and truly on.

On March 31 the ALP announced its proposed Baby Care Payment with much fanfare. It made the grandiose claim that the scheme fulfilled the ALP's "very strong commitment" to deliver "fourteen weeks paid maternity leave." And, bragged the Latham, "it does so with no cost to business. No cost to the private sector."

A week later the Howard Government responded with its pathetic package "to help vulnerable children." The Coalition is promising \$90 million a year to charitable non-government programs, while it continues to undermine the universality of Medicare, pours billions into wealthy private schools and does nothing to address the skyrocketing cost of childcare.

The ACTU came out enthusiastically behind the ALP's Baby Care Payment with Sharan Burrow calling it "cause for celebration by Australian women" and pledging to "campaign heavily on the issue at the next election."

The Howard Government has absolutely nothing to offer to working parents. However, the Latham proposal is being better received in the electorate, with many commentators calling it a "good start." But outrageously the Latham plan is that it is means tested. Once again, some women are expected to become economically dependent on a partner - this is not on!

The introduction of Baby Care Payment, presented as "the policy answer" to demands for paid maternity leave, lets employers off the hook and may even undermine existing paid employment-based maternity leave schemes.

The CPSU has given the Baby Care Payment a mixed reception, pointing out that "there is a growing sense of unease throughout the public sector about the ALP's pattern of announcing major restructure of Commonwealth agencies without providing details about employment, workload and service issues. As a result, public sector job insecurity is rising in the run up to the election." The union estimates that, based on announcements already made by the ALP, as many as 1,800 jobs are now under threat.

The Labor plan is also based on abolishing the two part \$1,053.30 Maternity Allowance payment, currently paid to the same target group as the Baby Care Payment. The Baby Bonus will also be abolished. In other words, the ALP is funding this "reform" in part through the removal of existing entitlements.

This is set to be one of the key issues around which the upcoming Federal election is fought. We must make campaigning around this one of our priorities. Socialist Alliance is well placed to campaign around the very clear proposal in our Gender Agenda policy document for "12 months parenting leave fully paid for by employer contributions to a publicly managed scheme."

Using this policy, we will be able to intervene to show that the introduction of a means-tested welfare payment has nothing at all to do with paid maternity leave as an employment entitlement - which should not be paid for by working class taxpayers. It must be funded by employers, who benefit through retaining experienced workers.

We therefore propose the following motion to Conference.

"This Socialist Alliance National Conference:

(1) welcomes any proposed increases in welfare payments to low income parents, especially if such increases are funded by taxing big business;

(2) rejects claims that such payments in anyway address demands by working women and their supporters for fully paid maternity leave;

(3) resolves to vigorously campaign around our demand for 12 months parenting leave, fully funded by employer contributions to a publicly managed scheme, and to make this one of the priority issues in our upcoming Federal election campaign;

(4) resolves to campaign within the union movement to popularise the demand for an employer-funded scheme as an industrial entitlement - rather than a taxpayer-funded welfare scheme

(5) resolves to seek out and build links with others campaigning around this issue."

## **Ideas for responding to the state of unionism and collective workers' struggle today**

*By Melanie Sjoberg (Adelaide branch)*

This contribution offers some recent data to assist our collective understanding of the state of the labour movement in Australia in the lead up to the 2004 national conference. Then it draws on recent experiences of our trade union work to address the suggestion, from Socialist Democracy and Workers League [*Alliance Voices* Vol 4 No 2], that we have been "ultra-left".

### **Working life today**

First, let's have a look at broad brush-strokes of working life in Australia today. Sydney SA members had the benefit of hearing from John Buchanan (Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training), at the August 2003 seminar, where he discussed the outcomes of his extensive study into working life. His book (written with

others) *Fragmented Futures* is recommended for any comrades wanting to discover more of the detail, and Barbara Pocock's *Work Life Collision* is also worth a read.

Precarious is the most relevant adjective to describe work for growing numbers of working people today. Buchanan cautions against the left clinging to the old union model of "harvester man" (i.e. sole breadwinning male in a full-time job), as it is no longer relevant or useful for developing our tactics in struggle today. The figures that cover hours of work and type of agreement also suggest that the old model, of union-made Awards with conditions that flow on to weaker sectors, is rapidly declining.

The statistics demonstrate that more people are working part-time and casual, and less people are union members. We should make a mental note that it means we need to be talking about how to raise politics and collective union action with part-time workers. It also means that we should think carefully about the image we conjure up when we use the word "unionist"

## **Union membership**

What is the reality of trade union membership today? Union membership has fallen to 23% of the working population; although this is more serious when it is noted that membership in the public sector is 47% and only 17.6% in the private sector.

Union membership by sector as a proportion of the workforce in that sector (ABS 6310, August 2003):

Mining 29%,  
Manufacturing 32%,  
Construction 25%,  
Retail 17%;  
Government administration (excludes health) 38%  
Education 41%.

These low levels are put into even more glaring perspective when we note the proportion of workers by sector (ABS 6203, 2002):

Mining 1%  
Manufacturing 12%  
Construction 7.6%  
Retail and wholesale 20.3%  
Government sector (excludes health) 11.7%  
Education 7.1%

The proportion of union membership in mining and manufacturing may be around one-third; however, the proportion of workers in those sectors is relatively low and declining in comparison to the overall workforce. Property and business now comprise 12% of the workforce, with finance and insurance another 4%.

On the other hand, there is a sizable union membership and workforce across the public sector and in education. The degree of union organisation and activity is demonstrated by statistics that show in September 2003 65% of all days lost through industrial action were from the education and the public sector and in October 2003 it was 32%.

What industrial instrument people are working under? (ABS 6306, May 2000):

Award 20%  
Collective Agreement 35-40%  
AWA 20%

And the proportion of employees on AWAs as a percentage of the total employed by sector:

Mining 54%  
Manufacturing 50%  
Construction 50%  
Retail 36%  
Government administration 7%

The growing proportion of workers on AWAs should especially be of concern to socialists, as this suggests that some layers of workers may either be convinced of - or at the very least resigned to - the individualism promoted by the Howard government.

What about hours of work? Full-time employment accounted for 90% of all work in 1960s. In 1988 it was 74% and by 2002 had fallen to 61% (ABS 6310).

Incidence of casual employment by industry (ABS 6310 2002):

Mining 9.5%  
Manufacturing 16%  
Construction 32%  
Retail 44%  
Government administration 8.2%  
Education 18.5%

Howard's Coalition is also striving to impose an agenda for the capitalist class and has already adopted measures that seriously erode conditions for working people in the workplace – as well as in health, education and welfare. The Workplace Relations Act, and now the draft Building and Construction Reform Bill, are designed to be harsh legal obstructions to collective action and are part of a direct attack on hard won working conditions. Not satisfied, the

government regurgitates its ideological agenda by revisiting waves of amendments to industrial laws on unfair dismissal, “better” bargaining, preventing union officials onto worksites, stripping awards further and even attacking the picnic day!

## **The Socialist Alliance trade union resolution**

What does this mean for our Socialist Alliance work? And does the SA resolution overstate the situation - as suggested by Socialist Democracy and Workers League? Our discussion needs to be based upon what SA is saying and doing in order to evaluate our tactics and judge what to do next.

The comrades appear to have overlooked the important resolution on trade unions, adopted at the 2003 SA national conference, and some important activities organised by SA over the past year.

The SA resolution openly acknowledges that union membership and activism in Australia has been in decline for over a decade – the figures above reinforce that reality. It notes the role of the ACTU-ALP Accord, the decline of activism and mobilising within unions and especially the lack of delegate committees and member meetings as contributors to this decline.

We could do a little more research into why union membership remains relatively high in the public sector, despite limited structures, activism and democracy. The public sector workplace is usually more open for unions to promote themselves, particularly at the state level, and the legacy of unionism may still hold sway in a workforce with an average age in the late 40s. This is more speculative - perhaps people who work in the public sector have a higher social or collective consciousness.

The resolution also argues that workers have a chance to rebuild militant unionism today and offers a range of tactics that can be applied in various situations. Surely comrades in the AMWU, MUA, CFMEU and TCFUA, and most recently in the CEPU, have shown through their experience and activity that rebuilding an alternative militant current is possible – even if it is concentrated in Melbourne and Perth.

On a less dramatic level, many SA comrades have been boosted and made some gains by raising issues on the job; talking to work colleagues and nudging other members into action where an opening occurs; or proposing campaigns that may assist in rebuilding collective unionism, like our CPSU comrades at the national council. This is a far cry from the proposition that we are over-projecting

## **What do Socialists need to do?**

Our resolution does not over-project nor offer magical solutions. In fact it points members to mechanisms that may assist to rejuvenate unions through education and awareness and by suggesting tactics that may help to rebuild delegate structures and active unionism. There are real benefits from SA members in similar areas establishing networks to communicate, keep informed and collectively discuss proposals for their union. We can make gains when comrades act with a confidence that comes from shared experiences.

One of our most important tasks is to extend these networks and to help less experienced comrades develop the confidence to take initiatives in their workplace – whether it is a supermarket, call centre or factory.

## **What has been the practice?**

I want to draw on experiences from our SA union work in Sydney in 2003, where I was involved in coordinating some of that work. We managed to implement the networking aspect of the resolution by establishing links between SA members in the AMWU, MUA, NTEU, NSWPSA and occasional discussion among teacher comrades. We also connected with a determined group of activists in the CFMEU that resulted in some of them joining SA.

Comrades participated in industrial action across each of those sectors and on some occasions we coordinated SA leaflets to assist our profile. We also built solidarity and support for other industrial and social movement actions. Most of this was reported through local branch meetings, *Socialist Campaigner* and *Green Left Weekly*.

We held a couple of public meetings to discuss militant unionism and current campaigns that attracted 60 plus people. We organised a trade union seminar that had more than 100 registrations from activists wanting to discuss the state of the working class, specific campaigns and a session by CFMEU Victorian Secretary Martin Kingham on rebuilding militant unionism.

We also offered a two-day education workshop, addressed by a supportive radical educator, that introduced some comrades to theory about how people radicalise and where we practiced talking politics and how to translate that into action. Janet Burstall has written a thorough contribution on this workshop for comrades.

Since arriving in Adelaide this year, it has become clear that the level of trade union activity is much lower. This has not prevented SA comrades from searching out other SA members who are union active and involving themselves when the opportunity arises. Comrades hold delegate, council and TLC positions from which they raise a range of industrial and social movement issues. Some SA members participated in the first state public sector strike for more than 20 years. We showed a new film about the MUA dispute and are promoting the May Day activities.

## **Are SA members adopting “ultra-left” positions in the unions?**

It is difficult to argue with a caricature: every union situation needs to be discussed and assessed on the basis of actual conditions and opportunities. The above experiences, however, show that our membership is making the effort to carrying out a wide range of activities and interventions that contribute to rejuvenating collective unionism and build an SA base in the process.

You would be hard-pressed to find an SA member who suggests there are magical solutions or simple formula. Rather than throw a jargon-laden sideswipe, it would be more helpful to contribute other ideas about what we could do better or differently to develop SA tactics and enable our class to resist attacks from the employing class.

## **Socialist Alliance and International Women's Day**

*By Linda Waldron (Melbourne West branch)*

The Melbourne branches of Socialist Alliance mobilised energetically for International Women's Day in March. Individual branches organised socialist-feminist initiatives, activists from most Victorian branches joined the IWD march and rally organising committee, and we mobilised at least 60 SA members and supporters for the rally on the day.

### **Political context**

The rally was relatively small with about 200 people. In 2003, at the height of the anti-war movement there were 2500 participants at the rally. Part of the drop can be attributed to the abstention of liberal feminists who prefer to organise IWD "celebrations" rather than a day of struggle for women's rights.

One group of liberal feminists organised a celebratory women's festival at Ceres *instead of* supporting a political march and rally. Although initially agreeing with the rally organising collective to cross-promote events, they did not mention the rally in their advertising, instead claiming in media releases that the official IWD event in Melbourne was their festival because it drew on and developed the tradition of the early socialist feminists who organised IWD as part of the struggle for women workers' rights. The theme of Melbourne's march and rally, "Women against war, racism and sexism", seems much more in keeping with the early socialists' struggle for women's rights.

The ALP front groups organised the "Annual IWD Women's Lecture", held in Melbourne Town Hall a couple of days before IWD. This lecture series, about 10 years old, has become increasingly apolitical. This year's "Women of Wit" was performance-oriented and 500 people attended at \$25 a head (with busloads of high schools students arriving with free tickets). The event organisers - Women's Trust, YWCA, IWDA and Royal Women's Hospital - refused to announce the IWD march and rally from the platform, and the march collective was not permitted to have a stall inside unless they paid a \$25 fee.

Other sections of the feminist movement were noticeably absent from the march and rally. Only one women's officer came from RMIT and the women's services sector has had no official presence at IWD rallies for years. Even though the attacks on the domestic violence and sexual assault services are deepening, the management of these services have become increasingly conservative and given up on fighting the state or federal government's neo-liberal agenda. (For example, there was very little outcry and no organised campaign against Howard's theft of money from the domestic violence sector in order to fund the anti-terrorist fridge magnets.)

### **Socialist leadership**

In this conservatised, demobilised context for women's liberation work, socialist activists showed clear leadership by raising real issues of concern to masses of women and taking these onto the streets.

SA branches in Melbourne found creative ways to build the march and rally and explore the politics of its theme: "Women against War, Racism and Sexism: we demand money for jobs, education, childcare, reproductive rights, health not warfare".

Footscray branch hosted a public forum titled "Politics of the veil: feminism, socialism and Islam", with a presentation by Margarita Windisch. Three Melbourne West SA branch members - myself, Fidan Yidirim and Brenda Ocampo - visited the Maribyrnong Detention Centre to receive messages from Kurdish detainees to be read out at the rally. We were photographed by local media with a giant SA refugee rights banner (the photo and story appeared in two local newspapers.) Melbourne West branch member Brenda Ocampo (originally from Argentina) was interviewed on Spanish language programs on 3CR about why young women need to march on International Women's Day.

Wills branch organised a forum exploring the neo-liberal attacks on women in Australia, with a presentation by branch convener Judy McVey (see her article in Seeing Red.)

Melbourne North-East branch held a public forum on the teacher's strike, highlighting the role of female trade unionists by profiling comrades on the state executive of the Australian Education Union.

Melbourne Central Branch organised the IWD breakfast on the day of the rally, at which we launched SA's "Gender Agenda: A Charter for Women's Rights". It was an inspiring beginning for the day of struggle for women's rights. 45 people attended, including Lynette Dumble from Global Sisterhood Network; Reihana Mohideen from Women's Rage and the International Secretary of the BMP (a Philippine trade union centre); and Jocelyn Scutt, the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner. SA National Convener Louise Walker gave a fabulous speech to launch the women's rights charter, which we should circulate widely within and beyond SA.

### **The Melbourne rally and march**

At the rally, about 60 SA members from Melbourne branches and Geelong campaigned strongly with the "Gender Agenda" and encouraged people to join us in exploring the links between feminism and socialism. SA had two large stalls and we signed up 35 people to participate in SA "Feminism and Socialism" classes.

SA election placards and a beautiful women's rights banner made for the most colourful and political contingent at the rally. SA members also initiated the IWD collective's after-rally drinks.

SA members and supporters showed clear political leadership from the platform. Brenda Ocampo and Marisol Salenas from the Chilean Popular Indigenous Network (an organisation considering affiliating to SA) were the rally chairs. Brenda explained why changes to higher education constitute one of the most aggressive attacks on young women today. Marisol gave a moving account of the struggle of Chilean indigenous peoples. Fidan Yildirim read out voices from the Kurdish refugees in Maribyrnong Detention Centre.

Brigitte Ellery from Geelong branch spoke for Radical Women on reproductive rights. Reihana Mohideen gave an inspiring argument for unity in the women's liberation movement. I spoke for Socialist Alliance, arguing for the need for socialism to liberate women and exhorting rally participants to turn election day into a day of protest by voting, joining and becoming active in SA.

After speaking I was approached by a number of people to find out more about SA, including a peace activist from Moe who has since donated to Melbourne West SA branch a number of publications which we have raffled to raise national conference delegate funds.

SA devoted considerable activist resources to the march organising collective. The collective included SA members from West branch (4), North-East branch (3), Wills branch (1) and Central branch (2). Of these 10, 2 were unaffiliated SA members, 1 from the FSP (representing Radical Women), 3 from Resistance and 4 from the DSP. It was very clear to all that SA is the organisation willing to fight against and offer solutions to women's oppression.

One highlight of the collective experience was raising the funds to bring an indigenous activist from Brisbane to speak at the rally. In the collective's discussion about the rally focus, SA members successfully argued for a demand around the Stolen Wages campaign. Debbie Brennan then contacted the Brisbane-based indigenous activists and the IWD collective negotiated with Australian-Asia Workers Links to jointly fund an airfare for Lenora Jackson to speak at the rally. It was tremendous to be able to show such practical solidarity with this important campaign.

SA members activated their trade union networks to raise half the airfare and help cover the march organising costs. The following unions donated:

AEU: 1000 leaflets printed for free

AMWU: \$350

ANF: \$200

CFMEU: truck and PA for free

ETU: \$350

MUA: \$200

VTHC: \$150

## **Improving our work**

Despite long and sometimes confused IWD collective meetings, we learnt a lot from the experience. We had the challenging task of reducing a desired list of 14 speakers to 8, then found that even the 8 who spoke on the day were too many (people left the rally before all had spoken), forcing then collective to cancel the scheduled "open mike" section.

As a collective, we could have improved our handling of debates that emerged, especially around the number of speakers, and the socialists in the collective could have worked together better to present a unified, politically clear voice. Socialist Alliance IWD "caucus" meetings before next year's collective meets might be useful.

Nevertheless, the excellent IWD groundwork done by SA members this year provides a sound basis upon which to build, in 2005, a bigger and broader but politically focussed IWD march that will attract more women to feminism and inspire them to resist all forms of oppression - to become socialist activists.

## **Correction to "Socialist Alliance Demands Justice for Indigenous Australians"**

*By Ray Jackson (Sydney Central branch) and Alison Thorne (Wills branch)*

A revised version of our contribution (*Alliance Voices*, Vol 4 No 5) was sent to *Alliance Voices* prior to publication. However, the new issue was uploaded as our corrected version was downloaded.

There were a small number of corrections - just typos, adding capital letters etc which we will not worry about correcting.

There are two corrections we would like published for clarity.

The first sentence of the second paragraph should read: "The last 12 months have seen the Socialist Alliance play an important role in the struggle for justice for Indigenous Australians".

The 3rd demand in the draft policy should read: "Repeal the Native Title Act and abolish all racist land laws; allow full control for traditional purposes".

## **Towards Alan Woodcraft's "paper which has mass appeal"**

*By Barry Healy (Perth Hills branch)*

Wills branch and now Melbourne South East branch have passed lengthy motions calling for "a paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance". Perth Hills branch, at its April meeting, passed a much shorter motion simply supporting the ongoing *Green Left Weekly* trial. We would like to see the trial succeed.

Against his own intentions, Alan Woodcraft of Fremantle branch ("Expansion NOT repackage: an Alliance paper of the Alliance by the Alliance", *Alliance Voices* Vol 4 No 5, April 2004) manages to indicate the need for the successful transfer of *Green Left Weekly* to Socialist Alliance.

Alan is correct in thinking that there is a large potential audience for a principled voice to the left of the ALP and the Greens, which is why we launched the Alliance in the first place. And the example of the Scottish Socialist Party is instructive.

In Tommy Sheridan the SSP had a spokesperson who was prominent enough to cut through the establishment media crush until more SSP members of parliament could get elected and the SSP could build its party structures stronger. He played the role of a "Tribune of the people", one who articulated the feelings and needs of the most oppressed and demonstrated principled politics in his behaviour.

The Scottish people could see in practice that they could trust the SSP because they saw that they could trust Tommy Sheridan.

The role of "Tribune of the people" can be played by individuals (living or dead; think of Che Guevara), institutions (e.g.: trade unions) or particular movements (the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo is an example).

It is the class struggle itself which creates the need for this role and which decides what content will fill it at any juncture; it can't be willed into existence, though we are always working towards it.

The Socialist Alliance in Australia is hampered by not having such a high-profile "Tribune". The closest individual to the role is John Pilger, who articulates the anger many people feel about the reactionary trends in Australian recent history and regularly attracts thousands to his public meetings.

SA members are leading figures and activists in various trade unions and we look forward to their future role as public spokespeople for socialism as they gain a mass hearing.

The closest institution we have to a "Tribune" is the *Green Left Weekly*, which has cut out a permanent space for the left on the street corners and on the web, and reaches out to a periphery well beyond that of the SA.

*GLW* is notable for not patronizing its readers, for not presenting populist "non-core" politics to suck people in while keeping its "core" politics (radical socialism) hidden away.

Alan's article is proposing precisely the opposite of that. He wants a "four-legs-good, two-legs-bad", populist paper to represent Socialist Alliance while the real, revolutionary politics is circulated on a more limited basis.

That would be a recipe for disaster. SA would be quickly exposed as hypocritical, just like all the mainstream parties that lead people to believe one thing while hiding their true agendas.

In taking on *Green Left Weekly* SA would be accessing the nearest thing the Australian left has to a widely read, independent press. Alan dreams of SA having a newspaper respected and read by the masses. Good, we all do. Such a thing will not be sucked out of our thumbs; the rudiments already exist and are available to SA.

## **Close collaboration in the anti-war movement reaps victories**

*By Margarita Windisch (Melbourne West branch)*

This contribution is a brief reflection on our work in the anti-war movement and our work within the Victorian Peace Network (VPN).

First, we can pat ourselves on the back for the hard work done so far. Most of Melbourne SA's anti-war movement work was channeled through the VPN, a network of affiliates with a delegated decision-making structure.

Socialist Alliance affiliates (ISO and DSP) and individual members were instrumental in setting up a range of local anti-war groups (Moreland, Darebin, St Kilda, Maribyrnong), which provided some space for activists, dialogue with the local communities and sharper anti-imperialist politics.

Socialist Alliance's "Block the Budget" initiative in 2003 did not go unnoticed. The petitions went down a treat on stalls and a healthy debate ensured that went beyond the anti-war movement. On May 1, 2003, Lincoln Hancock from SA raised this demand from the Trades Hall sponsored May Day platform to massive applause.

Resistance, which at the time was not an SA affiliate, but with most of its active membership in SA, mobilised thousands of young people in March 2003 through the Books Not Bombs movement. This gave the anti-war movement the edge it was lacking and it also helped push SA as the radical political alternative on the streets.

### **Working in the VPN**

The delegated structure of the VPN limits the coalition building possibilities outside this framework. It blocks the participation of individuals and consequently the development of new young leaders through struggle. The VPN structure is also prone to bureaucratism and unaccountability. It is generally very unclear where the real political decisions were being made; too many times it seems that the purpose of the affiliates' meetings is only to rubberstamp a

decision made on the steering committee (which comprises a select few members of various affiliates and the VPN organisers).

SA did not affiliate to the VPN but three of its member organisations did (DSP, ISO and Resistance). However, it has become increasingly clear that when SA affiliates collaborated before VPN meetings we could win some arguments related to broadening out and mobilising the movement.

For instance, SA members consistently argued for "Troops out" as the key VPN demand (which it still has), and also for sustained but focused VPN-organised public mobilisations. Last year we put up a motion for VPN to organise an anti-Bush demonstration in October, a motion we lost only after one of the best political debates ever in the VPN until the chair cut discussion.

Consequently SA members set up an ad-hoc committee to organise the anti-Bush protest, which mobilised some 1000 people despite some sectarianism from some VPN members and Socialist Alternative.

March 20, another initiative SA members pushed in VPN, proved to be another success. Despite some nervousness within the VPN, the "Troops out" demand stayed. Every single trade union endorsement for M20 was organised by Socialist Alliance members, including a last minute endorsement by Trades Hall Council (they had forgotten!).

We organised the keynote speaker (Terry Hicks), fought to have a key trade union represented on the platform (Martin Kingham, CFMEU) and wore down the *Age* opinion editor to the extent that John Pilger's opinion piece on the war appeared on March 20.

SA caucusing helped to convince a VPN affiliates' meeting to take out an ad for M20 in the *Age*, however this decision was overturned somewhere, somehow.

The Victorian SA conference the week before March 20 was another useful vehicle to plan our intervention into the demonstration as a cohesive and militant force. We convened a workshop on the politics of March 20 and our tasks for the day.

Consequently, SA affiliates and individuals worked together very well on the day, with joint stalls and members equipped with contact lists and recruiting materials roving the crowd. We distributed nearly 2000 anti-war recruitment leaflets, got three new joiners and lots of names on our contact list. Our profile was good and our contingent was vibrant.

The ISO's decision to recruit to SA and carry SA placards on M20 had a very positive impact on SA's ability to present a growing united socialist front, something that was noticeable on the day.

The next step is to build on the existing collaboration and professionalise our interventions through caucuses, informal discussions and joint working bees. These united activities are also useful to build up greater political confidence and help train new activists for SA and the movement.

## **A response to Comrade Morphett's concern**

*By Sam Pillay (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)*

This pre-conference discussion takes place in revolutionary times.

Revolutionary times because the United States wages *nuclear war* in Iraq and Afghanistan. We witness not the doomsday stuff of a mushroom cloud, not the Cold War, mutually assured destruction (MAD) bogey but the extermination – genocide – of selected humans, *untermenschen* – the Nazi term for those they considered sub humans – through the use of depleted uranium (DU) warheads. In the *New Statesman* of April 16, John Pilger quotes Dr Doug Rokke, director of the US Army DU project: "Solid uranium was used on shells. Tens of thousands of Iraqis – men, women and children – were contaminated." And this has been going on since Operation Desert Storm in 1990.

The reality of DU is the gradual, torturous death of survivors of the initial carnage and instant incineration. Iraqi and Afghani babies born deformed for generations to come will prove the barbarity of imperialism in the Middle East and Central Asia. It is genocide on a time scale.

It is a barbaric and racist war against a people. US practice in Iraq is part and parcel of a worldwide slander of Islam though it is not Islam that has declared jihad but Bush who carries on a crusade, a maniacal, messianic drive that cradles entirely comfortably with Zionist imperialist zeal.

Here is what Bush had to say at his recent press conference a mere week ago: "I also have this belief, strong belief that freedom is not this country's gift to the world. Freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. And as the greatest power on the face of the earth we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom."

"But religious war is not part of official US military doctrine," observed Sidney Blumenthal, former senior adviser to President Clinton, who reported the quote in a recent comment piece in the *London Guardian*.

Quite so. These are revolutionary times because a madman has hijacked not only his country's constitution but also plans to hijack an entire world. And he plans to continue using DU with abandon wherever he feels the need to spread the word of his god – mammon.

In talking about Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine and all the oppressed nations of Africa and Asia, and the Australian Aboriginal peoples, and the unemployed and single mothers, and of incarcerated refugees, we are talking about species *being*. *Being* is a *suffering* being, to paraphrase Marx, and suffering being is a *passionate* being because this *being* feels its suffering *passionately*, and wishes with all its will to be emancipated from its hell. Their loss is *our* loss, their suffering is our suffering and we should feel it *passionately*, because it is a loss for *all* humanity.

There is only a revolutionary way out of this imperialist bedlam.

For all its might, the US is in a bloody morass in Iraq, and their morale is shattered. This what Thomas L. Friedman – execrable theorist of the far right that he is – had to say in *The New York Times* recently: “Without more allies, without more global legitimacy – and without an Iraqi center ready to stand up against their Khmer Rouge now posing as their Viet Cong – we cannot win in Iraq. We will be building a house with bricks and no cement. In that case, we will have to move to Plan B. Too bad we never really had Plan A.”

The metaphors. The metaphors. Does this sound like a man who is not quaking in his boots? Does it not reflect the fear and loathing in ruling circles? And what is *Plan B*? Well may we ask: It is certainly not unilateral withdrawal.

Twenty thousand US troops have just been told they are staying on for another three months. Back home, veterans and armed service’s personnel’s families are on the march in protest against the debacle. Jews and Muslims protesting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s visit to the White House are arrested in Lafayette Park.

This is the international situation we confront. It is a revolutionary situation characterised by escalating political and economic instability, revolt, counter-revolt and betrayal, nowhere more pronounced than in the insurgency in Iraq and the latest developments on Palestine.

President George W. Bush has given Sharon the green light to retain parts of the West Bank. Here is an Israeli expert on his net gain: “Sharon must come home with some assurance that the [US] does not see it as a first step towards evacuation of most of the settlements. He also wants to be able to say that Washington will back him if he wants to use Apache helicopters to fire on the Gaza Strip after the pull-out.” These are the words of Menachem Klein of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies.

Iran – formerly a part of the Axis of Evil – has stepped in to Iraq to help quell the rebellion led by Moqtadar al-Sadr.

We socialists ought to hail the tenacity of the Iraqi people who rose as one, across tribal and religious lines to defy the occupation, never mind al-Sadr the dangerous demagogue. Without a revolutionary leadership, their uprising was doomed from the start even as they won the hearts of millions across the world.

This crisis, therefore, is one of *revolutionary leadership*. The question of the day is a *revolutionary question*. It is *the* issue on all the continents. The petty bourgeois nationalist governments grasp this fact very well. Why then is Iran in Iraq? Was the recent clearing of the decks – the forcible shifting from a semi-liberal clerical government to a fundamentalist leadership – a mere internal pantomime?

It would seem not. The Iranian regime understood very well what it had to prepare itself for and was on the ready as soon as a breakaway firebrand cleric sparked a spontaneous rebellion. And the Iraqi Shi’ia clerics were on hand to put al-Sadr back in his box well before the Iranians arrived, and they have stayed despite their senior diplomatic representative in Baghdad having been shot dead.

Are all these developments just developments in a far-off land rich in oil and teeming with mad mullahs? Hardly. These are revolutionary times, and it would take a thousand Marxs to trace every last connection to every other event worldwide.

But these connections exist and it is for this reason that we socialists must fight every last vestige of Australian exceptionalism: “It may be so over there, but it’s different here.” Yes, it may be that the national, economic and political characteristics of this island continent are different but Australia is inexorably drawn into the vortex of this imperialist crisis.

For a start, the current account deficit (CAD) stands at 6 per cent of GDP, which means the Australian economy is buying less than it is selling; hence the CAD. It means that the national economy has become a net borrower of cash, through investment finance mainly from China, Japan and the US.

Australian politics are, therefore, beholden to these finance masters, whether it is a Latham or a Howard government by Christmas.

To add to this nasty economic picture: Total US debt was running at more than \$US4 trillion at the end of 2003. Moody’s Investors Service did the sacrilegious last year: It said it could foresee the downgrading of the sovereign debt. In addition, the US federal deficit is expected to load an estimated \$US500 billion this year to the burgeoning debt.

Japan remains a financial basket case even if there have been some recent improvements but these have been at the expense of the working class and the middle class. And China’s economy is reported to be “heating up” – economists’ jargon for wobbly – to the point that Beijing has upped the reserve fund levels at its banks. The way out at this stage for the Chinese government is to pump more of its reserves of cash into the market, mainly to depress the US dollar and inevitably the Australian dollar in order to sell more of its commodities on a cheap yuan. The depressed currency market will in turn make Australian purchases even more cash heavy. A recession is not an unlikely outcome according to some Australian finance commentators.

Another thing: The National Australia Bank is far from safe. There is open talk that it is the teetering fourth pillar of the Australian banking system. An all-out brawl is going on in the bank’s mahogany circles, with some senior officers trying to sack the chairman, Catherine Walker, and Catherine Walker trying to lop the heads off a few more head honchos for the recent \$360 million currency trading debacle.

It is in the light of these circumstances that we are forced to look at likely outcomes in politics and economics.

It is a laughable proposition that that a Latham government could bring the troops home with impunity. His government will pay, and it will pay much more dearly than Howard has. This is not a matter of their political stripes but because the objective forces of imperialist crisis already drives the US to more barbarous forms of attack both in its military crusade and on the geopolitical front. For Australia, the Free Trade Agreement is one more disaster waiting to explode.

And for a final scenario: France's 20 of 21 electoral regions switched to the socialists last month, Spain's similar turn and the tumultuous events in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan this month serve to underscore the international and insoluble crisis. The African continent and Latin America are on the boil. It is an ineluctable line of revolutionary developments across the world.

So what will it be? Should we fear the likelihood of a Socialist Alliance leadership "dominated at leadership level by two revolutionary parties *and would appear so* to all outside the Alliance" (*AV Vol 4 No 4*) or should we shout out from the rooftops should such a change actually eventuate?

It is either socialism or barbarism, to quote Rose Luxembourg. But more, there is only scientific socialism: Marxism. What other socialism is there? Is there some utopian system of which some of us remain ignorant?

Or could we talk nicely to the imperialist bourgeoisie so they could be persuaded to lay down their arms and retire peacefully to their mansions while the working class and their allied ranks go about emancipating themselves?

Comrade Sam Wainwright specifically differentiates between *class struggle* and the *class collaborationist* approach in another context in reply to an unsigned Socialist Democracy/Workers League contribution (*AV, Vol 4 No 2*).

Let us take note. He calls things by their name, names names and denounces them. It might be added that these class collaborationsists, in which the world abounds, cannot be fought by other than revolutionary means.

The choice is ours, and we in the socialist ranks have good reason to be optimistic in our ability to strengthen our forces. But we can do this only if we unreservedly nail our colours to the mast of *class struggle*. It requires nurturing a class consciousness, a *working class consciousness*, which means every socialist must stand with the working class as the one class capable of leading humanity out of the current morass.

But before we go getting frightened, being revolutionary at this point in time merely requires taking the first steps to revolutionising our thought. It means that before we go trying to do anything else, we need to study socialism as a scientific world outlook, and change the way we think.

## **A Paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance – in perspective**

*By Austin Whitten (Sydney Central branch and SA-GLW editorial board member)*

David Glanz, head of ISO Australia, the owner of Australian *Socialist Worker*, has submitted a motion he moved and was passed by his branch, twice now to *Voices*. Before appearing in *Voices*, it was submitted to SA branches as a petition for endorsement. As the substance of the motion consisted of three binding policy decisions relating to how the SA-GLW editorial board should operate, including the number of times it should meet, the SA National Executive rightly reiterated the original motion that defined a trial period for exploring the offer of making *Green Left Weekly* the SA newspaper, establishing an editorial board to carry out the project.

In addition to dictating meeting frequency in the Glanz motion, the other points called for the editorial board to make SA material available to the affiliates and to "focus on linking our activist work with our federal election campaign."

The impetus for the motion and petition are somewhat mysterious as all three points were discussed and dealt with by the editorial board. One of the board's number is a member of the ISO and presumably reports on the workings of the board to the ISO as it is a representative position for ISO.

What should have been reported by the ISO rep was that the board has discussed making SA material submitted to *GLW* available to the affiliates and there was unanimous agreement to do this. It will be included as a part of the editorial board motion to be submitted to conference, which will be available for the next *Voices* issue.

What should also have been reported was that the board unanimously agrees that a prime focus of SA material in *GLW* is to identify SA activist work in regard to the upcoming federal election.

A dictated and binding frequency for editorial board meetings, however, makes little sense. The board has chosen a working subcommittee structure with monthly phone hook-ups of the whole board. It has been a useful structure that lends itself to expansion. This will also be covered in the board's motion.

The Glanz motion generally suffers from a lack of information or mistaken information about the SA-GLW project. As an apparent illustration of how little control or influence the board has, the motion states, "The DSP has made it clear that it will not entertain a change of name as things stand." The board has discussed names for an SA newspaper but did not settle on one and NEVER asked for the *GLW* name to change, nor would it, even if one had been decided on.

The ground rules for the trial period were clear – *GLW* would continue to operate under its own editorial control. Changes would take place only after common agreements were reached.

Let it be said, the *GLW* editors have been more than accommodating and patient during the trial, acting as mentors for publishing a newspaper. The experience has been invaluable and the relationship has been sterling. One of my tasks was to minimise the impact that the SA editorial board had on *GLW* editors' workloads. I operated on this basis at all times, but it was inevitable that we added to the work of putting out a weekly newspaper. I never heard or received a complaint.

The term of trial for the editorial board has been set to end as of the upcoming May conference, where the board is expected to report on its experiences. It made little sense to ask members to sign petitions concerning the SA-GLW project, binding the board to policies, especially since it has already agreed to two of them, ahead of this report. Little sense, that is, unless it represents dogmatic, doctrinaire opposition to the project no matter what the outcome is.

In his first submission, Glanz admitted that the ISO disagreed with the trial, yet agreed to take part in it to “establish whether the editorial board system is viable or not.” By majority board agreement, the system is viable. I personally found it a strange, unique experience to work on a committee with a member who was expected to be an active working participant but who belongs to a group that opposes the very concept of the project! The National Executive vetted all other candidates for a position on the board based on their enthusiasm and optimism – two valuable attributes to have on a working committee - for the project’s goals.

It is to the credit of Anne Picot, the ISO representative on the board, that she was able to be both a valuable member of the board’s working subcommittee whilst accommodating her affiliate’s viewpoints. The initial period proved to be more stressful than anyone wanted it to be until we sorted out ways of coming to terms with the few political differences that arose. ISO hostility to the project understandably created suspicions that exacerbated the settling in process.

Glanz’s motion also asks the SA National Executive to produce a draft plan for an SA newspaper covering format, frequency, editorial board, name, funding and any other relevant issues, as per the wording in a 2003 conference resolution. If anyone is willing to take this on, it would be a valuable exercise for attempting to define the alternative path – starting from scratch - that Glanz is promoting. I wrote “attempting” in light of the many decisions that a broad-based alliance would have to agree on. Glanz gives his personal view of what the paper should be in broad strokes - explicitly socialist, a campaigning and party paper, promoting Socialist Alliance and its “collective positions”, providing modest space for debate – essentially using *Socialist Worker*, whose readership is characterised by ISO regulars as having little time to read and a short attention span, as a model.

Presumably, all the other elements that are currently in *GLW* would be left for that publication to cover for the broad left readership, essentially the audience we would abandon but that the preamble in the Glanz motion contradictorily claims will be won over by leaving them out of an SA paper!

There is no escaping it. I believe *GLW* is closer to being an SA newspaper than anything that has been proposed that would be commonly agreed on by the overall SA membership. But if NE sees any success in supporting a project to define an ideal SA paper, the editorial board could use it as a working guideline for their work. The project, however, is likely to take years, if not centuries to complete.

In summary, the SA editorial board will report on the SA-*GLW* trial for the May conference. A majority of board members has voted in favour of continuing the project, growing its size, increasing SA material in *GLW* and involvement in the editorial process. The vote would have been unanimous save for the ISO representative, who voted against selected sections. The ISO, through their representative, will submit a minority report to the conference that is expected to appear in the next issue of *Voices* along with the majority report.

If the national conference agrees to continue the SA-*GLW* project, one would ask that dogmatic opposition to the overall will of the members be discontinued. Marginalisation within SA would seem to be the likely outcome if this is ignored. The editorial board process has shown that it is possible for Socialist Alliance members to find a way to work together for common cause. It is a case of alliance members coming together in fact as well as name, something that Humphrey McQueen has pointed out is not as common an experience as we would like.

## **A response to the contribution by Socialist Democracy and Workers League**

*By Kim Bullimore (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)*

In *Alliance Voices*, Vol 4 No 2 (March 2004), comrades from Socialist Democracy (SD) and Workers League (WL) argue that "Alliance perspectives for the past three years have been based on an overly optimistic analysis" and that SA is adopting "ultra-left positions in the unions and mass movements" and this will result in "confusion and demoralisation". This contribution is a response to a number of the issues raised by SD and WL.

### **Who is the Socialist Alliance?**

Throughout their contribution, SD and WL seem to be confused as to who exactly the Socialist Alliance is. They begin their contribution arguing, "at every point the Alliance majority has over-estimated the possibilities for the Alliance..." and then go onto criticise the Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP) for "endorsing these perspectives". However, rather than telling us exactly which of the Alliance majority positions they are critical of and providing a through analysis of why these “Alliance majority” positions are wrong, SD and WL instead proceed to argue why a variety of positions and perspectives adopted by the DSP are wrong.

In doing so, SD and WL are equating the positions of the Alliance majority to a variety of positions put forward by the DSP. The DSP, however, while being the largest affiliate in the Alliance, does not have a membership majority on any SA national body, or even on the national conference floor. By equating the majority positions of the Alliance with those of the DSP, the comrades in SD and WL are not only making an incorrect formulation, they are effectively disappearing the existence of Alliance members who are not members of the DSP and who make up the majority of the organisation.

SD and WL are entirely in their rights to argue against any position or perspective the DSP holds or puts forward for discussion in the Alliance. But to argue that the perspectives adopted by the Alliance majority are simply those of the DSP is disingenuous. Recognising SA as an entity in its own right is essential if we want the Alliance to move forward.

To continue to argue that SA is no different from one of its affiliates not only fails to recognise and acknowledge the activity and leadership of the comrades who make up the majority of the Alliance, and who are not DSP members, it also does nothing useful to build the Alliance or the socialist movement in general.

### **What's wrong with a bit of optimism?**

The formation of Socialist Alliance in 2001 was a concrete step forward for the left in Australia. For the first time, the majority of the organised left came together in a united organisation and this unity has provided the catalyst for many hundreds of non-aligned socialist and progressive activists to either join an organisation for the first time or to once again become active in a party framework.

Over the last two years, not only has the profile of the Socialist Alliance increased to a degree that it now easily blitzes the profile of any of the affiliates that helped found the organisation, the Alliance and many of its members have been at the forefront of leading many of the struggles against imperialism and racism, and for refugees, women's and workers' rights.

In the past four years, the Australian political landscape has thrown up a number of openings for a united socialist left. The ALP's bipartisan support for Howard's racist border control legislation and its opportunism and equivocation over the issue of the Iraq war saw many ALP members tear up their membership cards in disgust. This, along with the emergence of the Greens as a real electoral force, has opened up more space for socialists to be heard.

The mass anti-war movement, along with the refugee rights movement, have provided concrete openings for a united socialist left to not only play a leading role, but also win people to the socialist cause. And while there is not a mass radicalisation based on class-consciousness in Australia, we have seen the election of a militant current, despite the domination of the ALP, in a number of key unions, providing significant openings for socialists to be heard. If this is all not reason for a bit of optimism, I am not sure what is.

However, according to SD and WL, to recognise that the objective political situation in Australia is more favourable to socialists today than it was a decade ago is to take an "ultra-left" position. It is the case, as SD and WL argue, that "at every point the Alliance majority have over-estimated the possibilities for the Alliance..."?

### **SA's union work**

According to SD and WL, Socialist Alliance, "under the domination of the DSP", has failed to recognise that workers have been largely left in a defensive position and has not recognised that the "primary task is to rebuild union membership and to re-establish some basic union consciousness" and to build a revolutionary base in the unions. SA has "ignored this reality" and tried to "short-cut the struggle to build the unions", they say.

In their assessment of our work in the trade unions, SD and WL, while providing a lot of facts and figures, barely mention the fact that the decline in the union membership has not only been due to the concerted attacks by the government, the media and big business, but is also in large part a result of the ALP's Accord securing and producing a tame union leadership. This tame union leadership is not only more interested in subordinating the needs of workers to the needs of the ALP party machine and advancing their own careers, they also fail to provide a real fighting leadership against the attacks by anti-union forces in the government, big business and the media. The question for Socialist Alliance members is not just how do we stem the decline of union membership, but how do we rebuild *fighting, democratic* unions.

If we look at the concrete work of Socialist Alliance comrades in the last two years, we will see that this is actually what they have been attempting to do. Far from trying to "short-cut" the struggle to rebuild the unions, as SD and WL assert, Alliance members have been at the forefront of trying to rebuild fighting, democratic unions.

In Sydney alone, at least a two dozen SA comrades, including many who are DSP members, are active in their unions and leading the struggle to not only rebuild fighting unions but re-establish "basic union consciousness" and a revolutionary base (just as SD and WL advocate). This can be seen in the base building activities being carried out by SA members in the AMWU, NTEU, CPSU and MUA, as well as in the struggles being led by SA comrades in the PSA and Teachers Federation, to name a few.

Rather than ignoring that there has "been a decline in union membership" and the impact that this will have on SA's union work, as SD and WL contend, SA comrades are acutely aware of this and have sought to address this in several ways. This includes establishing a number of trade union caucuses and organising a variety of public meetings and discussions about how to rebuild the union movement. In Sydney, in the last year, Socialist Alliance has held a variety of such public meetings and trade union seminars, the most recent being a public meeting last month that featuring SA member and WA MUA secretary Chris Cain, titled "How can we make our unions fight for workers".

In 2003, Socialist Alliance printed as a pamphlet the SA national conference's trade union resolution, *Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win*, which outlines the basic tactics and strategies we think should be applied (and are being applied) to our work in the trade unions. This includes SA members: being active member of their unions and providing serious leadership on the day-to-day issues of wages and working conditions, as well as proposing campaigns around key issues such as shorter hours and pattern bargaining; promote solidarity with unions and unionists being victimised and attacked by the state and the bosses; being at the forefront of campaigns to organise and unionise un-organised workers, especially young workers and casual workers; taking a class approach when taking up campaigns such as the campaigns against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, campaigns against racism and for women's rights, Medicare and unemployment benefits and work to rebuild delegate structure, workplace meetings and trade union democracy and participation (see pages 5-9 of *Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win*).

Over 100 SA comrades are active in their unions nationally and are providing serious leadership in the bread and butter struggles in their unions. In addition, these comrades have been active in taking the anti-war and anti-racism campaigns into their unions, while also supporting a variety of other campaigns. They have been at the forefront, where it is possible (such as in the WA MUA and the Victorian AMWU) in rebuilding delegate structures, workplace meetings, trade union democracy and worker participation. SA members are also currently at the forefront of the Defend Craig Johnston campaign and have played a significant role in Victoria in the Defend Martin Kingham campaign. To argue, as SD and WL do, that SA has attempted to short-cut rebuilding the unions and has been lax in raising basic consciousness is clearly incorrect.

SD and WL also argue in their contribution that workers have largely been left in a defensive position and that there has been no new cycle of working-class militancy. While it is true that workers are largely in a defensive position and that we are not on the eve of a revolution, there have been a number of important gains which signal that a new cycle of militancy is starting to develop, at least in some unions.

With the election of Craig Johnston to the leadership of the AMWU metals division in 1998 and his election in 2000 as Victorian State Secretary of the AMWU, the militant Workers First faction of the AMWU were able to lift the wages and working conditions in not only weakly organised workplaces, but also extend the conditions and wage of workers in strongly organised workplaces.

Workers First has, for the moment, lost the leadership of the AMWU in Victoria, but in the meantime the stranglehold of the conservative leadership in the Western Australian MUA has been broken with the victory of the Rank and File group led by Socialist Alliance member Chris Cain and has resulted in Chris' election to the state secretary position. In addition, the election of SA Geelong branch convener Tim Gooden to the position of Assistant Secretary of the Geelong Trades and Labor Council and the election of Danny Doherty from the rank and file group Workers Unity to a leadership position in the Queensland AMWU, as well as the election of leftist Joan Doyle to the leadership of the Victorian Division of the CEPU have the potential to provide, develop and extend a militant current which can and is challenging the conservative bureaucrats in those unions.

So while there has not been an outbreak of generalised working-class militancy, there is evidence of the beginnings of a new cycle of militancy in some unions. To recognise as much does not necessarily make one "overly-optimistic" or in danger of taking an "ultra-left" position. It does not distort our work, but simply makes us aware of openings that have begun to develop and puts in perspective our need to rebuild fighting, democratic unions that will defend and extend workers' rights.

## **SA, recruitment and the anti-war and anti-globalisation movements**

The anti-globalisation movement which burst onto the streets of the western world in 1999 in Seattle brought, in Australia, up to 20,000 people out against the WEF in Melbourne in 2000 and again for M1 in 2001 outside stock exchanges around the country. The movement has not "vanished", as SD and WL assert, but has simply reconstituted itself as one of the core strands of the worldwide anti-war movement. Both the anti-globalisation movement of 2000 and 2001, and the subsequent anti-war movement, have drawn thousands of young and older Australians into anti-imperialist struggle. While not all those drawn into these movements see themselves as anti-capitalist, they are open to anti-capitalist ideas and it is the job of Socialist Alliance to try to win them to becoming socialists.

According to SD and WL, Socialist Alliance has failed to do this. SD and WL argue that despite the spectacular anti-war marches, "this did not translate into recruitment for Socialist Alliance or any of the left groups". A quick survey, however, of the Sydney branches reveals that this is not the case (as I am sure would a quick survey of other SA branches around the country).

In my branch, Canterbury-Bankstown, we have recruited at least five active members to SA through our work in the anti-war movement in the last year. Three of these we recruited as a direct result of our work in the Canterbury-Bankstown Peace Group, while two others were recruited from the broader anti-war movement.

All members are now active in the SA branch: one is now a member of the branch co-ordinating committee/executive and recently stood as our mayoral candidate for the Canterbury Council; another was a candidate on our council ticket for Bankstown; one comrade takes part in regular SA stalls; another is now an active member of the branch's "campaign/propaganda committee"; and the other is actively building Socialist Alliance on her university campus, where she is the Student Association Vice-President and Education Officer.

Eastern Sydney Socialist Alliance has also recruited new members from our involvement in the anti-war movement (at least one activist from the Randwick Peace group and several others from the wider movement). Similarly, the Marrickville branch now has four new members as a result of the branch's anti-war campaigning, and North Sydney branch has recruited a member of the Northside No War group and three others from their consistent local anti-war campaigning. That branch's solid anti-war work has allowed them to grow from just one stall in the Chatswood area to now doing four regular SA stalls in Northern Beaches and Chatswood/Lane Cove areas. Sydney West branch has also attracted through their anti-war work a number of new activists who are working closely with the branch.

While the recruitment to SA from the anti-war movement has been modest, and there may have been more success in some branches than others, it is incorrect to argue that the Alliance has made no gains out of our anti-war work. Instead, the SA perspective and approach toward the anti-war movement has been the correct one and has resulted in a growth in our organisation – in membership numbers, experience, public profile and respect in the broader movement.

## **Crisis in the ALP and the new Latham leadership**

According to SD and WL, "while there may have been some justification for the claim that Labor was facing 'a serious political crisis' before Latham became leader, but it is not true today, and it will only disorient the Alliance electoral campaign". This statement glosses over the situation that the ALP has been facing for the last eight years and makes no real analysis of the new Latham leadership. Nor does it offer any insight or suggestions as to what should be changed in SA's elections perspectives, or what additions, changes or deletions should be made to the Socialist Alliance Manifesto for the 2004 Federal Election (see *Alliance Voices*, Vol 3, No 13, December 2003).

With the defeat of the Keating ALP government in 1996 and the uninspired, "small target" policies of subsequent ALP leaders, Beazley and Crean, which tail-ended Howard's Coalition, the ALP has for the past 8 years been an organisation in crisis. According to an Evatt Foundation report in 2002, most ALP branches had declining attendances and at least 40 branches were defunct. The 2002 Queensland ALP conference was informed that membership had declined by 10% over the previous year, and in April 2003 an executive member of NSW Young Labor noted that membership of the ALP's youth organisation had fallen by over 3000 in the last few years. Queensland Young Labor noted that their membership was around 450, half the figure of a decade ago.

The election of Mark Latham to the leadership of the ALP has, it is true, re-invigorated the ALP both internally and in the eyes of a tired electorate, and SA must take account of that in our campaign. However, Latham's "new third way" for the ALP is little different from that of Tony Blair. Latham's policies not only promote privatisation, economic rationalism and social conservatism, they are also based on a populist anti-elitism (similar to Howard) which denies the existence of systematic oppression and discrimination in Australia (based on class, race, gender, etc).

So, while it is true that an ALP led by Latham may actually succeed in ousting the Coalition from government, it is clear that the policy of neo-liberalism will continue to reign in Canberra. This can be seen clearly in a range of Latham's policies. His right-wing agenda has been resoundingly highlighted with the announcement that he would abolish the peak national elected Indigenous body, ATSIC. In response to the announcement, Rupert Murdoch's *Australian* ran an editorial congratulating Latham. It gloated about how Latham had ignored the Labor Left to "consign ATSIC to the historical dustbin". Howard, obviously emboldened by the Labor Party's policy shift, has now moved to abolish ATSIC knowing full well that there will be little opposition from the so-called Opposition. Latham, in response to Howard's announcement, has been quick to take credit for Howard's decision, saying that Labor "had once again shown the way on policy". NSW ALP premier Bob Carr similarly gloated in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that "I note the Prime Minister is following the lead and content once again of a policy already put forward by the federal Opposition Leader, Mark Latham".

Latham's leadership has resulted in the further marginalisation of the Labor Left and the further entrenchment and domination of the ALP Right. This fact has been noted even by bourgeois papers, such as *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. While *The Australian* rejoiced in Latham's ability to marginalise the Labor Left in relation to Indigenous affairs, the *SMH* ran an editorial (13 April, 2004) titled "Standing Up for Liberties" which raised concerns about the Labor Party's seeming cart blanche support for Coalition legislation to do away with civil rights and increase police powers. The *SMH* editorial highlighted the fact that the "federal Labor Opposition indicates its is prepared to agree to future government legislation even before its detailed content is known" and that "alarm bells should ring" as the Federal cabinet had "recently mooted a raft of laws aimed at further enhancing police powers to detain citizens without legal representation and to make it a crime to train with an organisation which later is deemed to be 'terrorist' ". The editorial goes on to ask, "who within the two major Australian political parties are raising his or her voice about the importance of balancing the perceived need for more draconian measures with the equally important preservation of civil liberties?". Not only are the small "I" liberals in the Liberal party silent, argues the editorial, but that "the Labor Left, the traditional campaigner against too much police power, is also strangely quiet".

Even blind Freddy could work out that the primary reason for this quietness is that the Labor Left leadership is willing to subsume principled opposition to draconian legislation so as not to reduce the ALP/Latham's chance of election.

According to the SD and WL comrades, with Latham in the federal ALP leadership Socialist Alliance is now in danger of engaging in a distorted electoral campaign. However, they do not tell us exactly why this is or what we should change. Are SD and WL arguing that the Socialist Alliance should not point out the shortcomings and political opportunism of Latham's "new" ALP? Are they arguing that we should fall in behind the ALP now that there has been a turn around in their fortunes? What exactly should we be doing different? SD and WL could have contributed to a very important and valuable discussion about our election campaign work by actually articulating what they think we should be doing different.

## **Our work with the Greens**

In their contribution, SD and WL also give the impression that somehow SA (and by implication the DSP) has taken a sectarian approach to the Greens, stating: "there are also many opportunities for joint work with the Greens" but "this demands a mature leadership that is not blinded by sectarian preoccupation with building the Alliance, and engages in struggles in order to win, whether or not any recruitment to the Alliance takes place". Again, a quick survey of branches activities reveals that SA is working well with the Greens in a non-sectarian manner.

For example, in my branch one of our closest allies is a local leader of the Greens. He has spoken a number of times at our branch meetings, and at SA public forums and rallies organised by SA, and we have also been working closely with him in the local peace group. Last month our branch approached the Greens to run on a broad anti-racism ticket in

the NSW council elections in the Canterbury-Bankstown area. While they declined to be part of the ticket, we agreed on a direct preference swap, as SA did with the Greens in other councils in those elections.

A similar situation can be found in the Sydney West branch, where the local Greens candidate was recently invited to speak at an SA-initiated speak-out, and where SA has worked closely with the Greens in the anti-dump campaign and local anti-war work. If the SD and WL comrades cared to investigate the activities of branches, they would find many other examples of such collaboration between SA and the Greens.

## **Conclusion**

Over the past three years Socialist Alliance has moved from being simply a electoral front towards becoming a united, multi-tendency, socialist organisation which involves the majority of the organised left in Australia and hundreds of socialist and progressive activists who previously had not belonged to any organisation. We now have well over two dozen branches around the country and have begun to do serious, long-term work in many areas including the unions, the anti-war, refugee and anti-racism movements, as well being involved in a variety of other campaigns such as defence of civil rights, various international solidarity campaigns, and among students. In many of these campaigns, SA has provided both practical and ideological leadership, and our political influence and authority among the broader left, including the Green and Labor left milieus, is growing.

The potential for SA as it moves more towards a united, multi-tendency, socialist party is very significant and this, in my book, is definitely something to be optimistic about.

## **On Radical Women and Socialist Alliance**

*By Debbie Brennan (Wills branch member and the Melbourne Organiser for Radical Women)*

To Louise Walker, National Executive and National Co-Convener

Dear Louise

Thank you for your response (February 10) to Radical Women's letter to the National Executive in which we explained why RW decided not to affiliate. Your reply flags disagreement with key principles of RW's existence: the right of an oppressed group to autonomously organise, and the need to build a mass women's leadership organisation. We welcome the opportunity to elaborate on this and related issues as well as the basis of RW's longstanding support for SA.

In your letter, you argue for SA's transformation from a united front into a multi-tendency party and the idea of uniting around purely organisational, not programmatic, principles. This argument, originally put by what is now the Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP), is one that our sister organisation and founding SA affiliate, the Freedom Socialist Party (FSP), opposed from the outset. RW shares the FSP's position that principled unity works only on the basis of political agreement on key points, not organisational expediency. This debate is well documented, and I won't repeat it here. But I raise the argument to answer your accusation against RW of "organisational separatism" and a "self-imposed separatist existence" as well as political groups who defend their programs of "clinging to separateness" and "political enclave culture."

Radical Women is an autonomous women's organisation with a revolutionary feminist program. You call us separatist on both counts. On both counts, you're wrong. RW's political program is based on the theory of Russian Revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky that the leadership for revolutionary change comes from the most downtrodden. Like Trotsky, we recognise that because private property-based systems have historically needed sexism to survive, women come into the movements already radicalised, just by being women. Class, sexuality and race sharpen our determination and embolden us even more to be leaders for change. Because of the way oppression, in any form, is so deeply entrenched and brutalising, autonomous organising is the building block for oppressed groups to turn themselves from victims into fighters and provide the theoretical, militant and incorruptible leadership that the movements so badly need.

Radical Women was founded in the United States in 1967 by New Left student activists and feminist radicals of the "Old Left" socialist tradition, who refused to be treated as second class by the male leaders of the social movements. Gloria Martin, one of RW's founders, explains that the group was

formed to "demonstrate that women could act politically, learn and teach theory, administer an organisation, develop indigenous leadership, and focus movement and community attention on the sorely neglected matter of women's rights - and that women could do this on their own." Program and autonomous organising are the opposite of separatist: they are unifying!

An early example of how Radical Women provided leadership was its involvement in the anti-Vietnam War mobilisation. At the first protest it attended, RW's contingent arrived dressed as Viet Cong women - complete with guns. In the U.S., this was not only politically poignant, it was gutsy! A lot of male activists of that period believed that because women couldn't be drafted, they had no place in the movement (except for office work and domestic/sexual services). RW responded that while we opposed the draft, we also opposed the sexism that excluded women from it. We said that the "the second sex" would make the strongest draft resisters. Our members talked to GIs about how sexism, racism and the promotion of violence against women are essential to military indoctrination. By countering the prevalent single-issue perspective of the war, we went beyond the slogan "Out Now" and called for the defeat of

imperialism and victory of socialism in North Vietnam. In the anti-war coalitions, we fought for democracy and a voice for Marxist feminist viewpoints, in particular recognition that women are among the chief victims of war. RW vigorously argued for an end to the slavish devotion to the pro-capitalist Democratic Party. Our history equips us to draw the same connections in today's anti-war movement - again calling for explicit feminist, anti-capitalist solutions.

When the U.S. State amassed its forces against the Black Panthers ("anti-terror," 1960s style), RW again stepped in. The Black Panthers called on us to defend them against a threatened police attack on their headquarters. We organised a human shield that blocked the cops from entering the building, and thwarted the attack. The respect that the Panthers had for RW came from the connections we continue to draw between race, sex and capitalism and the fact that we had boldly called them on the sexist treatment of women in movement.

From those early days, Radical Women has now grown to have branches across the United States and in El Salvador. Our chapter in Australia was established in 1983. We've remained deeply involved in all movements - anti-imperialist, anti-fascist, feminist, queer, union, Indigenous, and socialist - persistently fighting for a Marxist, feminist voice.

Right now, RW branches across the United States are preparing a Revolutionary Feminist Contingent to the March for Women's Lives on April 25. Although the march is organised by the pro-Democrat, femocrat lobbyists within the National Organization of Women, this much-needed mobilisation for abortion rights is inspiring multi-issue militancy - something this historic struggle needs more than ever before.

We've had to fight just as hard for reproductive and queer rights in Australia. RW is working toward a vibrant grassroots campaign for childcare and paid maternity leave, with the potential to win these crucial demands rather than see them die a slow death from backroom deals in Parliament and the ACTU. Without RW's intervention in Melbourne's IWD Collective this year, the word "sexism" would not have been included in the anti-war, anti-racist theme. This was as part of a collective that was overwhelmingly made up of other Socialist Alliance members!

As the left wing of the feminist movement and feminist wing of the Left, Radical Women differentiates ourselves from radical feminists, whose anti-men separatism leads to a dead end of individual "solutions" for social problems. We just as vigorously differentiate ourselves from liberal lobbyists, who sell out for respectability and preservation of the status quo. We recognise that feminism and socialism are inextricably related as strategic parts of humanity's struggle to liberate itself from capitalism. They are consistent, interdependent and harmonious at every point. The Radical Women Manifesto says why this is so: "It is by [women's] involvement that the [union], radical, people of colour, ethnic minority, and sexual freedom movements can be pressured to come to grips with [women's] issues, which are also their issues. In addition, we must work to radicalise the feminist movement and educate women to the multi-issue nature of our struggle, which means teaching them the need to make common cause with the

entire working class and with revolutionary politics." Hardly a separatist position!

You go on to say that unless RW - or any organisation - affiliates to SA, we won't be taken seriously: "Those who embrace greater unity in and through the Socialist Alliance demonstrate to the rest of us how seriously they take the rebuilding of the socialist movement in Australia, and so the esteem with which they are held within the Alliance will grow. In turn, the other ideas that are important to those tendencies will be taken more seriously." This position sounds like the "political enclave culture" you accuse us of - the opposite of what you say should be the "sharing and building upon one another's efforts, experience and connections." Does it mean, for example, that SA takes Workers First less seriously simply because it supports, but has not affiliated to, Socialist Alliance? In other words, SA is not going to grow if there is a sectarian attitude that the socialist movement begins and ends within SA.

What if RW were to put this argument to SA and demand that SA affiliate to RW? Although RW wouldn't take a sectarian position, what if we were to demand that SA affiliate as a condition of RW supporting SA? Of course we wouldn't, at this point, ask SA to affiliate to RW, because we do not share a socialist feminist perspective nor common program. It's on the basis of SA's formation three years ago - ie agreement that the working class needs a socialist electoral alternative - that RW has actively supported SA since Day One. We do not have to affiliate in order to continue supporting this important united front project.

RW has contributed a lot to SA over the past three years. For starters, RW members joined SA. We have committed resources to every election campaign. One of our members, Alison Thorne, was the lead candidate on the Victorian Senate ticket at the last Federal election. RW member and stalwart of SA's Geelong branch, Brigitte Ellery, was SA's candidate for Lara, polling nearly 3% of the vote. We motivated our supporters to join and recruited scores of our supporters, workmates and family members to join SA to help achieve electoral registration. We have mobilised our members and supporters on each polling day. In this year's election, we've raised funds for Wills by bringing 16 members and supporters to its April 3 dinner and selling raffle tickets for RW supporter Peter Hannaford's bold political paintings. We are now gearing up to go door knocking for the upcoming Federal election campaign, and we will again be there on polling day.

Our meeting in April will feature Senate candidate Lalitha Chelliah, Wills branch convener Judy McVey and Brigitte Ellery. With the FSP, we helped to shape SA's policies on education, housing, health, public transport, opposition to corporate globalisation and privatisation, industrial relations and welfare. We take great pride in SA's excellent Gender Agenda because of our contribution to giving women's struggle prominence.

While we support SA as a united front, we are about building a mass women's movement capable of leading and bringing on a global, socialist revolution. Our priority right now is an international campaign to recruit women to RW.

We also have published stunning new editions of fiery feminist classics, such as *Women of Color: Front-Runners for Freedom*, *Lesbianism: A Socialist Feminist Perspective* and *Woman as Leader: Double Jeopardy on Account of Sex* - and more. Our website is something to see: [www.radicalwomen.org](http://www.radicalwomen.org) and anyone wanting to get onto our mailing list to receive our monthly calendars can just contact us. We invite interested Socialist Alliance women to get in touch with us and join.

Through Radical Women, women can build Socialist Alliance into a feminist socialist force which would be strengthened by more revolutionary women leaders. Women join RW on the basis of agreement with the Radical Women Manifesto which explains our socialist feminist theory, program, and organisational structure. Anyone can get a copy for \$12, either by visiting Solidarity Salon, 580 Sydney Rd, Brunswick or ordering by phoning 03-9388-0062 or e-mailing [radical.women.melb@bigpond.com](mailto:radical.women.melb@bigpond.com)

Our meeting on 19 April is showcasing Socialist Alliance. Here are the details: In this Federal Election, there is an alternative - Exercise Your Right to Choose!, 7.00pm at Solidarity Salon, 580 Sydney Rd, Brunswick. All SA members are welcome.

## **Revised Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group Proposal on National Leadership Bodies**

Dear Socialist Alliance Comrades

Extensive discussions have indicated that our initial proposal to transfer existing National Executive representative functions into a more broadly-based democratic and participatory National Council, and re-creating the NE into a leaner and more effective working political leadership body, cannot be implemented at this conference (*AV*, vol.4, no.2). There is not sufficient time available for the inclusive membership discussion required in making this shift, and various attempts to integrate the concerns and amendments of the respective tendencies lack sufficient agreement.

We propose that the Alliance make interim arrangements based upon the existing NE structure at this conference and take the next year to assess and develop a more considered approach that addresses all the key issues raised and that will take the Alliance forward to complete the transition towards the MTSP.

Current NE arrangements are based upon the Non-Aligned Caucus (NAC) conference document adopted at last national conference.

It created a NE of 50% non-aligned representation, expressed as State representation. It also allocated minimum Affiliate representation (through reduced representation by voluntary agreement of the DSP) to accommodate the increased non-aligned representation and allay smaller affiliate concerns regarding the MTSP. This voluntary agreement was based upon the NAC NE political slate commitments that all the interests of the Affiliates would be guaranteed by the NAC majority as the MTSP implementation and affiliate political and asset integration (especially the DSP) proceeded.

The NAC NE commitments based upon the 2003 conference document conclude at this conference. There has been no formal ongoing caucus structure since last conference that can guarantee the democratic accountability of NAC NE representatives or extend the existing NAC NE political commitments made going into next year. Accordingly, some adjustments have to be made to the current structure at this conference.

We believe that the 50% non-aligned representation is indispensable to the progress of the Alliance as a broad-based multi-tendency party of socialist reform. This should be retained. Without the political accountability of the NAC NE conference document, we believe that the democratic selection and accountability of non-aligned state representatives should now be more directly based upon the State branches they are meant to represent.

We also believe that larger Affiliates should now also have fair and equitable representation in their own right restored, based upon their respective membership weight in the alliance.

### **We suggest the following arrangements for next year:**

That the National Executive be composed of:

1. Affiliate representatives. Affiliates to receive one representative per 50 Socialist Alliance members (or part thereof), with declared Socialist Alliance tendency figures subject to scrutiny by National Conference on request.

2. Non-aligned State and Territory representatives. The total number of non-aligned State and Territory representatives shall match the total number of affiliate representatives, plus one to create an odd-numbered National Executive with a non-aligned majority.

3. Each State or Territory shall have at least one non-aligned State or Territory representative, with the remainder of the total number distributed proportionally among State and Territories in accordance with their membership at the time of the 2004 National Conference.

4. State delegations shall submit (including, if necessary, by meeting at national conference and electing by proportional representation) their slate of provisional State/Territory NE representatives to national conference, subject to ratification at their next State conference and with full right of recall.

5. The non-aligned State/Territory representatives shall be responsible to their respective State or Territory Conference;

6. If further organisations affiliate to the Socialist Alliance, the extra State or Territory representatives needed to maintain a non-aligned majority on the National Executive shall be distributed to States and/or Territories according to

membership at the time of the 2004 National Conference, and elected by the succeeding appropriate State and/or Territory Conferences.

7. National Conveners (NC) to stay as a 5-person working political leadership body, with a minimum of 2 non-aligned and no affiliate having more than one rep, elected by conference slate from the incoming NE, as with current arrangements.

**We also recommend that the following NE and NC arrangements be considered at conference to make this adjusted leadership structure be a more effective working political body.**

1. That the 5 National Conveners each take direct responsibility for facilitating national coordinating committees/working groups to integrate and develop the national administrative, policy and campaign work of the alliance. These working coordinating committees would consist of VOLUNTEER NE members willing to add national working functions to their representative functions, members of the existing national policy/campaign committees, and State Executive delegates as required, that are interested in helping shape the concrete national political work of the alliance and share the workload (see appendix A).

2. That the conference give consideration to the NE meeting on at least a bi-monthly basis, with the national coordinating committees meeting in between and the NCs meeting in the intervening weeks (see appendix B). This will streamline and reduce the administrative and meeting workload of comrades occupying national working leadership positions and maximise the opportunity for participation of non-aligned members in undertaking representative and working leadership functions.

3. That NE/National Conference authorise expenditure to upgrade Alliance telephone facilities to enable more effective meeting hookups to accommodate the expanded NE that will arise from these proposals (approximately a 33 member NE).

We believe these interim proposals embrace the diversity of issues and concerns surrounding our current leadership bodies and the need to make them more effective for making the transition towards the MTSP.

In comradeship,

Non-Aligned Caucus National Executive Working Group

John van der Velden, National Co-convener

Louise Walker, National Co-convener

Raul Bassi, National Co-convener (proxy)

Lalitha Chelliah, National Executive Vic. (proxy)

Simon Millar, National Executive Vic.

Dave Riley, National Executive, Qld.

Paul Kringas, National Executive ACT (proxy)

## **Appendix A: Proposed National Coordinating Committees/Working Groups**

Each National Coordinating Committee/Working Group (in the 4 areas nominated below) would be facilitated by a National Co-convener.

Establishing team-based National Coordinating Committees (NCC) will create a culture of collective leadership, responsibility and accountability in the political work of the Alliance and assist in developing a working leadership role among the newer (especially non-aligned) NE members. It will provide a collective sharing of tasks to be done and allow for a smooth transition in backup support if one person needs to temporarily stand aside and a proxy, or replacement, integrated so that the work can continue.

Having each NCC facilitated by a National Convener will more directly integrate the formal day-to-day national political leadership (ie. NC) with the areas doing the concrete national political work. Likewise, establishing a framework for encouraging NE and State Executive involvement in this national coordination with the existing working committees (eg. Trade Unions, Elections, Anti-War committees) will deepen the collective leadership of the Alliance, without adding administrative layers, duplicating efforts, or leaving the practical political work (eg. implementation of NE decisions) in a few hands who become effectively 'in charge of everything' by default.

National administrative, policy and campaign work can be thematically and substantively divided into 4 areas of central importance to the development of the Alliance.

1. Finance and Membership Administration and Development (F'n MAD CC): Membership communication (eg. Alliance Voices, Socialist Campaigner, SA website), recruitment, finances and administration (eg. Branch liaison and administrative standardisation, eg. bookkeeping), NE agenda papers and NC/NE minutes

2. Trade Unions (TUCC): caucuses, campaigns, policy, recruitment

3. Anti-war and International Solidarity (AISCC): eg. Anti-War committee and other related policy areas, solidarity work, international collaboration

4. Social and Economic Policy Development (SEPDC): eg. Elections committee, campaigns and platform; policy groups and priority campaigns (eg. women, Medicare, education, transport, economy, refugees)

### **Draft National Coordinating Committee (NCC) Operating Description:**

Share the National Convener (NC) workload on behalf of NE, consisting of:

1. monitor and integrate the work that is being done in the national sub-committees, policy committees and campaigns relevant to the NCC's area.

2. liaison work between the NC/NE and the State/Branch executives and the conveners of relevant committees/campaigns (eg. survey minutes, point of contact)

3. report to NC/NE as required on the work that is being done nationally, and assist in conveying to NC/NE the perspectives of the working areas of the Alliance
4. generate proposals to expand/improve the political work in existing areas, and create new committees in neglected and emerging policy and campaign areas.
5. implement National Conference, NE and NC decisions and communicate these decisions to the relevant working areas/branch committees of the Alliance.

## **Appendix B: Proposed Schedule to Integrate NE Working Leadership and Representative Functions**

NE meets bi-monthly, or as required.

Each National Coordinating Committee meets monthly or as required.

National Conveners meet in the intervening weeks.

Those occupying formal national working positions (eg. NC, current national working group conveners) have no more than one formally required meeting per week, enhancing the amount of concrete national political work that can be done and shared.

Formal representative functions of NE being bi-monthly (in a standard schedule) will permit NE members to do additional national working group tasks, or ease the burden on their individual State/branch/affiliate work.

Example Schedule in a standard 2 month period starting from National Conference:

National Conveners meet the week before and after the NE meeting to prepare/implement the NE agenda.

National Conveners meet the week before and after their individual National Coordinating Committee to plan/assess the concrete tasks and developments that have taken place in the work area

Total in a 2-month cycle:

NE working group (NCC) members have 3 core meetings in a 2-month cycle (one NE and 2 NCC).

National Conveners have 8-9 core meetings in a 2-month cycle ( 6 Conveners meetings, 2 NCC meetings, one NE)

Between formal meetings, NC and NCC can operate by email/phone networks and sub-NCC team collaboration on concrete tasks.

## **Letter to SA from the Socialist Party on elections**

*Printed below is an April 16, 2004, letter from the Socialist Party to the Socialist Alliance, responding to previous correspondence from SA to the SP on the question of contesting the seat of Melbourne in the upcoming federal election (all previous correspondence on this question was published in Alliance Voices, Vol 4 No 5).*

Dear Jody [Betzien, Melbourne Central branch convener] and all SA members,

The Socialist Party in Melbourne has decided not to stand in the upcoming Federal election in the seat of Melbourne. We will call for a vote for your candidate, with preferences to the Greens, then Labor.

We believe that having two socialist candidates in the upcoming election (SP and SA) would not be a positive and your proposed alternative of Stephen Jolly running in the seat under the SA banner is not acceptable to us.

We support the creation of a new workers' party in Australia based on the militant unions, community groups and progressive individuals. We call on the trade unions to break from Labor and help build such a formation. However, timing in politics is key, and we believe that the establishment of SA in 2001 without the necessary forces has been a negative in terms of boosting support for a new party. Therefore we cannot stand under your banner or indeed join SA. However we want to maintain comradely working relations with SA and all forces on the left in the exciting period ahead.

We think that this election will see a short-term and temporary squeeze on the vote for socialist candidates and even the Greens' rapid growth will slow slightly (although more victories for them in the Senate and even in the lower house in not to be ruled out).

It is quite clear that the ranks of the ALP and many active members of the trade union movement have been re-energised by Latham. However once a Latham Labor government begins to disappoint, as it will, significant opportunities will open up for the forces of Marxism as well as a renewed boost for the Greens.

We do not think we could justify SP standing in this election knowing that SA intends to stand, or indeed stand one of our members under your banner for reasons explained above.

Having said that we do believe that if maximising the socialist vote was the key criteria for who to stand, SP would have the strongest case. In the future we reserve the right to stand in this and other seats.

In November the Socialist Party in Melbourne will be concentrating our election work on the Council elections, in the City of Darebin and City of Yarra. We ask SA to support our candidates - we will send you details on the exact wards and candidates as soon as possible.

We believe that - in particular in the City of Yarra - we can earn some gains in terms of respectable votes and profile for socialist ideas.

We send you comradely best wishes in your election campaign, despite the differences we have.

In Solidarity

Stephen Jolly, for SP



