

# Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

Vol 5 No 11, December 2005

\$2

## Information

<b>SA launches petition to ACTU for urgent action</b> <i>Sue Bolton, National Trade Union Committee convener</i>	2
<b>Petition to the ACTU</b>	3
<b>Biggest workers' protest ever - united we will win!</b>	4
<b>Guilty until proven innocent - 'justice' in the 'war on terror'</b>	4
<b>Socialist Alliance supports militant ticket in CPSU elections</b>	5
<b>SA-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board progress report</b>	6
<b>Democratic rights campaign</b>	7
<b>Industrial relations campaign</b>	7
<b>Join a Socialist Alliance campaign e-list</b>	7
<b>The DSP and the Socialist Alliance: Draft resolution for the DSP congress</b>	8

## Discussion

<b>Proposal for a campaign of general strike agitation</b> <i>Shane Bentley (Sydney West branch and MUA member)</i>	12
<b>The Socialist Alliance – Going nowhere since the Conference?</b> <i>By Carlene Wilson (Wills branch and Workers Power)</i>	15

NOTE: The content of articles published in *Alliance Voices* reflect the views of the author, not necessarily those of the Socialist Alliance.

# **SA launches petition to ACTU for urgent action**

*Sue Bolton, National Trade Union Committee convener*

The SA national trade union committee and the SA national executive have decided to launch a petition calling on the ACTU to organise a national stoppage and protests early in the new year. [see copy of petition below]

The reason we decided to launch the petition is because we heard word that the November 23 ACTU executive had a big debate about whether or not there would be any more mass protests. In the end they voted to have another mass protest sometime in 2006. An ACTU IR campaign meeting in mid February is scheduled to decide the date of the next mass mobilization.

Since the ACTU executive, the ACTU has released a statement about its strategy which indicates that the ACTU's approach is to only organize activities to keep the opinion polls pointing in the right direction for the ALP, but not try to defeat the legislation. This is why we decided to launch a petition to be faxed to the ACTU.

The deadline for sending the petition to the ACTU has been provisionally set as February 10, until we can find out the date that the ACTU's IR campaign is meeting.

As well as discussing the wording of the petition on the SA national trade union committee, we've been discussing the wording with some of the Geelong unionists and some AMWU organizers who are very keen to take the petition around worksites.

If a few unions take up the petition as well as SA members and other rank and file unionists who want to see a national stoppage and mass protests early next year, it will give the petition move legs because the organizers will be able to get a lot of signatures.

The petition is in line with the motion that was passed unanimously at the Geelong rally on November 15.

We should get a wide range of signatures, not only from unionists but also from members of community groups. To have any effect, we need to get thousands of signatures and not just hundreds.

The Victorian Trades Hall Council executive had its last meeting for the year. A proposal for a mass protest and stoppage was put forward but in the end, the executive voted to have a mass delegates' meeting on the day the legislation is proclaimed (in the week of March 1-we'll know the date by December 17), some sort of stunt action during the Commonwealth Games while the media is in town, and then a stoppage and mass protest either in mid-April or May but a date hasn't been set.

Some of the unions were not keen to have a mass protest during the Commonwealth Games or the Grand Prix. Other unions felt that they wouldn't have time to win all of their membership over to another mass protest by March but felt that they could do this by April or May.

Trades Hall reconfirmed its commitment to organize a mass response to major attempts by bosses to use the legislation.

The fact that the VTHC hasn't set a date for another mass protest makes our petition to the ACTU more important.

There are motions being passed by different unions calling for action. The NSW Teachers Federation state council passed a motion that: "Federation's senior officers are to call on the ACTU and Unions NSW to plan further industrial action in the first half of 2006". The motion added: "Federation claims will continue to include, where appropriate, job security issues, union involvement in dispute resolution clauses, unfair dismissal rights and paid trade union training leave", directly contradicting the Work Choices legislation. The last component of the motion declared, "... if a federation officer is fined or imprisoned for demanding that a member be treated fairly, then an immediate stop-work of members be called as a show of solidarity and support to that officer".

A national delegates' meeting of the Australian Nursing Federation carried a similar motion. Some NTEU branches have also passed similar motions.

There is a recognition from a lot of unionists that there needs to be an industrial strategy as well as a political strategy, but very few unionists have been prepared to come up with concrete proposals for an industrial campaign so far. We hope that the ACTU petition can get broad support so that SA unionists can be the catalyst for a national stoppage.

If you hear of any unions or unionists pushing for industrial action and mass protests early in the new year, or you want to participate in the SA national trade union committee, or subscribe to the email group, send me an email to [sueb@greenleft.org.au](mailto:sueb@greenleft.org.au) or give me a ring on 0413-377-978 or (03)9304-3743.



# **Biggest workers' protest ever - united we will win!**

*This statement was issued by the National Executive on November 17, 2005*

The tremendous display on November 15-16 of mass opposition to the Howard government's attacks on workers and trade unions showed the deep desire of working people across the country to resist - and stop - the Coalition's attacks.

At least 600,000 people (reports are still coming in) met, rallied and marched around the country on November 15 and 16 - double the number mobilised in the last national actions against the IR changes held on June 30/July 1. Many workers risked fines or dismissal to participate.

The Socialist Alliance congratulates everyone who participated in this important day of defiance.

Some of the rallies - in Melbourne, Adelaide, Geelong, Wollongong and many other regional centres - were the biggest workers' protests in living memory. The magnificent rally of a quarter of a million people in Melbourne, which was called early and build strongly by the Victorian Trades Hall Council, showed what is possible when the union movement and the broader community join forces to give a voice to the overwhelming majority in this country who oppose Howard's attacks.

Many meetings and rallies unanimously passed resolutions calling on the ALP to repeal all of Howard's anti-worker and anti-union laws when next elected to federal government, and specifically to abolish AWAs; advocating industrial action as part of the next round of protests against the laws; and committing to act in solidarity with any worker or trade union targeted under the new laws.

In Geelong, the huge rally of 30,000 adopted a motion that:

1. Calls on the ACTU and VTHC to organise a national stoppage and protests early in the New Year as the next step in the campaign against this legislation;
2. Strongly encourages individual unions to organise their own mass meetings and actions as part of the overall campaign; and
3. Pledges to offer full support to the first unionist, union and/or worksite targeted under these laws.

The Coalition government and the corporate bosses have tried to dismiss the nationwide actions as irrelevant, but the spirit and confidence of working people around the country to fight back, to stop the new laws in their tracks, got a big boost.

In his Sky Channel broadcast to the meetings and rallies, ACTU head Greg Combet pledged to "fight until we win". The biggest ever workers' protests on November 15 show that we can win.

With further mass protest actions early next year, combined with coordinated industrial action, and a preparedness to join together to fight every attack on every job, every working condition and every union, we can make the political and economic price too high for Howard and the bosses to implement their new laws.

When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty and the Socialist Alliance - our union members and leaders, students, and unemployed or retired workers - pledges to continue to wholeheartedly help build the emerging fight-back, to resist every attempt to implement the anti-worker laws, and in the process to help rebuild a strong, democratic and fighting union movement in this country.

Socialist Alliance National Executive: Sue Bolton (MEAA), Craig Johnston (CFMEU organiser), Tim Gooden (Secretary, Geelong and Regions Trades and Labor Council), Dick Nichols (MEAA member), Sam Watson (NTEU), David Glanz (MEAA delegate), Peter Boyle (MEAA), Melanie Sjoberg (PSA), Alison Thorne (CPSU delegate), Dave Riley, Pip Hinman (MEAA), Mark Lockett, Alex Miller (NTEU), Kieran Latty and Lisa Macdonald.

## **Guilty until proven innocent - 'justice' in the 'war on terror'**

*Socialist Alliance statement issued on November 9, 2005*

In the week in which PM John Howard's support as preferred prime minister dropped to a three-year low, the arrest of 17 people in Sydney and Melbourne on November 7-8, allegedly for planning a terrorist attack, was exceedingly fortunate timing for the federal government. The overnight escalation of the "anti-terror" fear-mongering campaign that the government and media have perpetrated since September 11, 2001, will be a convenient diversion from the government's new industrial relations laws, opposed by the overwhelming majority of people in Australia. Any doubt that the raids were politically stage-managed should be dispelled by the fact that the police invited sections of the mass media to join them. Forty-eight hours after the arrests, the details of the charges against the 17 remain undisclosed. However, this has not stopped the media and politicians, Coalition and Labor alike, proceeding to charge, try and convict them - whether or not they are guilty of any illegal activities. The presumption of innocence until proven guilty has been thrown out the window in the so-called war on terror. The chances of these 17 men now getting a fair trial is now almost nil.

The Socialist Alliance condemns all terrorist acts. The targeting of innocent civilians is horrendous and unjustifiable. But there is a fundamental difference between discussing political and religious beliefs, suicide bombings or even how to make a bomb, and actually carrying out a terrorist act.

That difference - between thought and action - has been obliterated in the new terror laws that the Howard government, with full Labor Party backing, is rushing through parliament. These laws, which criminalise dissenting ideas, annul the right to silence and remove legal "due process" from public view, are a violation of basic human rights. If we are to continue to call Australia a democracy, they must be resisted.

The Socialist Alliance joins with all those who refuse to be intimidated and silenced by the government's "anti-terror" propaganda and laws.

We will continue to speak out for the immediate withdrawal of all Australian military personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan. The Australian government's participation in the inhumane and illegal war on the Iraqi people, and its wholehearted support for imperialism's war of terror, is creating more, not less terrorism.

We will continue to defend the right of all people to full freedom of speech and association, and oppose the banning of any organisation by the Australian government.

We will continue to campaign for the repeal of all federal anti-terror laws, and demand that the federal ALP opposition reverse its shameful support for Howard's police-state laws, and that all state Labor governments repeal the anti-terror laws they have passed in recent years.

And we will continue to condemn ASIO-police raids on the homes of Muslims and stand in solidarity with the victims of these attacks. The huge sums of public money being spent on these terror raids should instead be spent on a public education campaign against racism towards the Middle Eastern and Muslim communities.

[The Socialist Alliance is helping to establish an emergency response network of all those who want to help defend individuals or organisations under attack from the new police-state laws. To sign on to the network, email [national\\_office@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:national_office@socialist-alliance.org)

The text of the emergency response network pledge form is:

### **Defend civil liberties!**

### **Defend workers' rights!**

### **Join the emergency response network**

The Howard government is rushing through parliament "anti-terror" laws and industrial relations laws that will dramatically reduce our fundamental rights to freedom of speech and freedom of association, and are an attempt to silence and disorganise any opposition to the government's policies and practices.

In the face of these attacks, community unity and solidarity will be essential and, along with trade union defence groups and civil liberties organisations, the Socialist Alliance is helping initiate an "emergency response network" of all people who are willing to be contacted to provide active support to any individual or organisation that comes under attack from Howard's new laws. You may be contacted to attend emergency protests, or help out on picket lines, or participate in a phone-tree, and so on.

Please add your contact details below, and encourage others to also join the emergency response network.

## **Socialist Alliance supports militant ticket in CPSU elections**

*The Socialist Alliance issued the following statement of support for the Members First ticket in last month's Community and Public Sector Union elections. A report on the campaign will be published in the next issue of AV.*

The Socialist Alliance supports militant currents in the union movement to assist working people to better organise themselves to fight the attacks on their pay and conditions of employer moves to privatise and contract out, casualise, replace industry awards with enterprise bargaining and individual contracts (AWA's), de-unionise workplaces and victimise union delegates and activists, as well as opposing and resisting the Howard second wave industrial legislation that would assist employers in these attacks.

Socialist Alliance supports the Members First rank and file group in the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU), one of the largest unions in Australia, and agrees with its platform. It correctly focuses on:

- actively mobilising CPSU members against Howard's proposed industrial relations laws in concert with other unions;
- opposing the mass introduction of individual contracts and persuade public servants of their dangers;
- planning to move back to industry-wide bargaining starting with pattern bargaining (along the lines of the highly successful industry wide pattern bargaining of the AMWU Victorian Branch in 2000 under the leadership of Craig Johnston) to end the current situation of widely differing pay and conditions in the federal public service;
- opposition to casualisation and outsourcing as well as organising workers from overseas to ensure pay and conditions parity with their fellow workers;

- defending the right of union delegates to organise and use workplace resources without fear of victimisation;
- opposing the sale of Telstra as harming vulnerable sections of the community and Telstra workers and seeks to build a campaign to retain public ownership of Telstra with the 70% of the community opposed to the sale;
- boosting the base of organisers for more effective organising in the workplace;
- reversing the centralisation of power in the hands of the CPSU National Secretary and redistribute it to members in the form of local organising offices, regional decision making forums, and mass meetings to decide important issues;
- seeking to bring national official's pay back towards the average of pay for federal public servants; and
- again involving the CPSU in campaigning for social justice issues, such as defending vital community services like Telstra, public education, public transport, reallocating funds away from the war in Iraq back to much needed social services, and opposing sexism, racism and homophobia, both on the job and in the community.

Further details on the Members First platform, campaign and contact details can be found at: <http://www.members-first.org>.

## **SA-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board progress report**

*The following six-month progress report was unanimously endorsed by the SA National Executive at its December 4, 2005, meeting.*

The resolution proposed by the GLW-SA liaison editorial board and adopted by the SA National Conference in June 2005 reads:

1. Conference recommends that the board continue its non-sectarian work of encouraging a pluralist and diverse range of voices and perspectives from within SA to publish in Green Left Weekly.
2. Conference recommends that the protocols agreed on in February 2004 be adopted with the effect of putting the GLW- SA partnership on an ongoing footing. Conference notes that this is not a resolution recommending that GLW, as it currently is, be adopted as "the SA paper". Conference calls for constructive debate from all quarters on how, with GLW as a starting point, the development of an SA newspaper can proceed. Conference encourages affiliates of the Alliance with their own publications to consider ways of pooling their resources with those of GLW to create an even more effective publication for the left and socialist movement in Australia.
3. Conference recommends that the current editorial liaison board be replaced by a smaller board consisting of at most 12 members, elected at the SA national conference. In a spirit of non-sectarianism, conference emphasizes that there are no political restrictions or requirements on the composition of the board other than SA membership: any SA member is eligible to serve on the board, regardless of their political orientation, affiliation or lack of it, so long as they undertake to work pro-actively, constructively and in a non-sectarian manner in furthering the GLW-SA partnership. However, the board is conceived of as a working group and should not be tied down by revisiting debates that have already been democratically settled within SA. Those debates can be continued, if necessary, in the appropriate forums outside the board. This smaller board will continue the current work of the GLW-SA board, and also make a concerted effort to exploit the current resources - copy list, weblogs – to make progress on encouraging a diverse range of SA input into GLW and developing the GLW-SA partnership. The board will report as required to the NE on progress made towards this end.
4. Conference expresses its thanks to the GLW owners, editor and staff for their encouragement, cheerful cooperation, and commitment to the Socialist Alliance.
5. Conference recommends that in the light of the impetus the SA has received through this partnership the board encourages individual Alliance members who support this project to support it further by voluntarily contributing financially, voluntarily subscribing to, and voluntarily helping to distribute Green Left Weekly.
6. Conference recommends that SA branches, state committees, National Coordinating Committees and caucuses elect/appoint a comrade to liaise with the incoming GLW-SA board to advance input into and distribution of GLW.
7. The 2005 National Conference instructs the SA-GLW Board to present a report on its work no later than six months from now, and earlier if it has any problems pursuing its charter. At the Conference, the following were elected as members of the GLW-SA board: Chris Johnson (Geelong), Tony Dewberry (Wills), Bernard Wunsch (Northern Rivers), Dave Riley (Brisbane), Alex Miller (Sydney Central), Kerryn Williams (GLW staff), Peter Boyle (Marrickville), Andrew Watson (Northern Rivers), Maureen Frances (Sydney East), Jude Morton (Canberra), Julie Sloggett (Bankstown).

Progress towards the objectives laid out in the conference resolution has been slow but relatively steady. There have been few complaints from Socialist Alliance members regarding articles submitted to GLW, with only a couple rejected or significantly amended on grounds of length and space.

Although the board has made little headway in exploiting the weblogs, the GLW-SA copy list has continued to function as before, with planned contents posted on the copy list every Monday for feedback from members of the list. The most significant progress has been made with respect to soliciting contributions to the "Our Common Cause" column from the new members of the GLW-SA board. Since Conference, there has been little difficulty in soliciting contributions to the column, and a column has appeared in every issue of GLW bar one. Most importantly, almost all of the members of the GLW-SA editorial liaison board have authored columns. Overall, 18 OCC columns have been published, and these are listed below:

- Guilty until proven innocent - 'justice' in the 'war on terror' (SA Statement)
- Welfare-to-work program punishes the poor (Linda Seaborne and Alison Thorne)
- Industrial relations, war and civil liberties (Chris Johnson)
- No to war and terrorism: Australian troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan now! (SA Statement)
- Hurricane Katrina & US capitalism (Bernie Wunsch)
- Stop the war on civil liberties! (Lisa Macdonald)
- The truth about David Hicks (Raul Bassi)
- Make August 13 a protest fixture (Alison Thorne)
- Why Iraq occupation breeds terror (Margarita Wundisch)
- Defending student unionism (Julie Sloggett)
- National ID card: a threat to civil liberties, not terrorists (SA Statement)
- Understanding the world, then changing it (Alex Miller)
- The unity of labour is the hope of the world (Seeing Red editorial)
- Barbarians, their way of life and values (Peter Boyle)
- Lifting the veil of secrecy (Jude Deland)
- Socialists, Greens and the ALP (SA Conference Resolution)
- Keep up the fight for refugee rights (Tony Dewberry)
- A socialist party for the 21st century (Alex Miller)

Members of the board have also been active in publishing news, discussion and Cultural Dissent items in GLW. In the next 6 months, the GLW-SA liaison editorial board plans to continue its work with the following targets:

- Each member of the GLW-SA board will author at least one OCC column in the next 6 months
- Each member of the GLW-SA board will author at least one article (in addition to the OCC) in GLW
- Each member of the GLW-SA board will solicit at least one article for GLW from an SA member who is not a member of the board.

## Democratic rights campaign

*The December 4 meeting of the national executive decided that:*

1. Socialist Alliance to write a letter of solidarity to the Tamil Coordinating Committee following the police raid on them last week. The letter should be uploaded onto the Socialist Alliance and *Green Left Weekly* web sites.
2. To work on developing broader support for the emergency response network, compiling a list of lawyers and prominent people willing to speak out and act against applications of the new terrorism laws, and build the Civil Rights Network national e-list.

## Industrial relations campaign

*The National Executive meeting on December 4 adopted the following relating to the campaign against the Howard government's industrial relations attacks:*

1. That we immediately start a petition to the ACTU calling for further action, that an initial deadline for the petition be set by the trade union committee, that the petitions be collected centrally (rather than sent directly by others to the ACTU) so that we can gauge the extent of support for the call for action, and that targets be set for the collection number of signatures collected to help provide a clear goal for comrades to work towards;
2. that we seek support among Victorian and WA unions for a 1 March mass protest and another mass delegates' meeting. If a 1 March protest is agreed to in these two states, some other states might follow; and
3. that we circulate a fact sheet around unions about how the anti-terror laws effect unions.

## Join a Socialist Alliance campaign e-list

To join any of the following e-lists, established for Socialist Alliance members to exchange information and ideas about specific campaigning areas, just send a blank email to the following addresses:

**Civil liberties/democratic rights:** sademocraticrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Women's liberation:** sawomensrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Justice for Indigenous people:** saindigrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights:** sasexualityrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Refugee rights:** sarefugee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Anti-war:** sa\_anti-war-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Welfare issues:** sa\_social\_justice-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Green Left Weekly content:** saglw\_copy-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

**Trade unions:** There are a range of national e-lists for members of particular trade unions.

For more information about the union e-lists, contact: national\_office@socialist-alliance.org

## **The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance: Draft resolution for the DSP congress**

*The following draft resolution, which is currently being discussed by the membership of the DSP before being voted on at the DSP's Congress in January 2006, was sent to the SA national executive on December 11 and submitted to Alliance Voices for SA members' information.*

### **Introduction**

1. In the wake of the decision of the May 2003 Second National Conference of the Socialist Alliance to adopt the perspective of transforming itself into a single, multi-tendency socialist party and to "accept and welcome a strong revolutionary socialist stream as an integral part of our vision of a broad socialist party", the Democratic Socialist Party declared itself an internal tendency in the Socialist Alliance and renamed itself the Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP) at its 21st Congress in Sydney, December 27-30, 2003.

2. The resolution "The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance" set the DSP on a course of building the Socialist Alliance, progressing its transformation into a united, multi-tendency socialist party and integrating as much of the resources of the Democratic Socialist Party into the Socialist Alliance as possible. However, despite our best efforts, over the past two years we have not been able to build the Socialist Alliance into an effective new party and our attempt to integrate as much of the resources of the DSP into the Socialist Alliance as possible has stalled. While the smaller affiliates have remained opposed to, obstructed, or abstained from most collective political activity in the Socialist Alliance, too few leaders and activists have so far emerged from the majority of Socialist Alliance members who are not in any affiliate group.

3. This resolution supersedes the 21st DSP Congress resolution "The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance" and resets our perspectives and objectives for work in the Socialist Alliance.

### **Political space for the Socialist Alliance remains**

4. The opening for the Socialist Alliance was very concrete, we noted in our 21st Congress resolution. We saw it as a response to the beginning of a new cycle of working-class and anti-capitalist struggle signaled by:

- the mass high school walkouts against the racist One Nation Party of Pauline Hanson;
- the mass opposition to the 1998 attack on the Maritime Union of Australia;
- the mass solidarity with the East Timor national liberation struggle, which forced both Coalition and Labor parties to reverse their longstanding policy in support of the Indonesian occupation;
- the 20,000-strong, three-day S11-2000 blockade of the Melbourne World Economic Forum; and
- the huge anti-war movement that erupted before the invasion of Iraq.

Some sort of left unity project, like the Socialist Alliance, was essential if socialists were to get a broader hearing from the working class in these new circumstances.

5. However, since then, there have been some significant retreats in the social movements. The massive movement against the invasion of Iraq melted away quickly in the wake of the invasion and occupation by the US and its allied imperialist aggressors. Though opinion polls in Australia and other imperialist countries show majority opposition to that occupation, the anti-war movement remains weak and in some cities divided and there have been no large anti-globalisation mobilisations over the last couple of years.

6. The re-election of the Howard Liberal-National Coalition government - and this time with a narrow majority in the Senate - deepened the mood of demoralisation and demobilisation in the broader social movements.

7. While the Socialist Alliance has fielded candidates in state, local and federal elections, the votes obtained have generally been lower than that previously obtained by Democratic Socialist Electoral League and other socialist candidates. This generally poor result, combined with Howard's re-election, has resulted in a drop in participation and activity in most Socialist Alliance branches since late 2004.

8. The main reason for the Socialist Alliance's poor votes is the electoral rise of the Greens, who now capture most of the broad left vote including that of many progressive people who respect the work of the Socialist Alliance. However, as elected Greens candidates at various levels of government are politically tested, the space for candidates to the left of the Greens will open up - as was demonstrated by the election of Socialist Party member Steve Jolly to the Yarra Council. The Green party is unclear about whether its aims can be achieved under capitalism or not. This leads the Greens to underestimate the importance of independent working-class mobilisation and organisation in favour of parliamentary activities. While there are some socialists and other grass-roots activists within the Greens, there is a rightward pressure exerted on the party by its wealthier supporters and by its parliamentary focus. Moreover, the Greens generally remain weak in many working class communities and electorates where anger and disillusionment with the

ALP potentially provides the support base for a new workers' party. As the Greens' political limitations become clearer, the Socialist Alliance can convince left-wing Greens activists to join a working-class party with an effective strategy for social change and ecological sustainability. In this framework, the DSP remains committed to close collaboration between the Socialist Alliance and the Greens in community, social, environment and electoral campaigns.

9. While over the past two years there have been some setbacks for the militant trade union current (e.g. the deposing and jailing of militant former AMWU Victorian secretary Craig Johnston, a prominent Socialist Alliance member), that militant minority continues to exercise considerable influence in Victoria and has made gains in other states.

The Socialist Alliance has gradually advanced the organisation of its members and supporters in the trade unions and has built campaigns around the demands of its action platform. Its united campaigning, while limited (notably the other affiliate groups are not very active in the trade union or other caucuses), continues to be more effective than the individual efforts of any single socialist group. In several cities, Socialist Alliance members are respected leaders of the militant trade union minority, enjoying the support of thousands of militant workers.

The election of Socialist Alliance members Chris Cain as WA secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, Tim Gooden as secretary of the Geelong Trades Hall Council, Chris Spindler as president of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the successful June 2005 National Trade Union Fightback Conference are a few examples of these gains.

10. The 2005 Fightback Conference brought together a broad range of militant trade unionists and was the initiative of militant trade unionists in and around the Socialist Alliance. Our initiative and campaign for mass delegates meetings and mass industrial and political action on June 30, first in Victoria and then in WA - which clearly sparked the broader and growing round of mass actions around June 30/July 1 - made this conference possible. The new national Fightback network launched at this conference has increased the potential to organise unionists for the fight against the federal government's industrial relations legislation on a broader scale.

11. The Socialist Alliance is more widely identified by workers as the political pole of recent militant initiatives on the trade union movement and more militant workers are now joining the Socialist Alliance, though still at a modest rate. On the back of Fightback's success, the fourth Socialist Alliance national conference elected a more democratic national executive that includes prominent trade union and social movement leaders such as Craig Johnston, Sam Watson and Tim Gooden. The challenge is to try to develop this into an effective leadership.

12. These two conferences set a challenge for the Socialist Alliance to play a serious role in helping lead the mass working-class resistance to the Howard government's new anti-union laws. The 350,000 workers who mobilised on June 30/July 1, put the Howard government on the defensive.

The June 30-July 1 trade union demonstrations were the largest mass mobilisations seen since February 2003. In the intervening two and half years, the biggest demonstration (apart from the 10-15,000 strong forest rally in Hobart in March 2004 and the 10,000-strong Save the Tasmanian Forests march in Melbourne in June 2004) in any single city was about 5,000-strong. The June 30-July 1 demonstrations were preceded by delegates meetings in some states which indicated a new willingness to fight in the trade union movement's ranks. Activists in other social movements began to understand the strategic need to defend the trade union movement - the last remaining social movement in his country with any ongoing mass organisation.

13. The second round of mass protests (on November 15) in which more than 600,000 workers participated, took the struggle to a new stage. The current trade union leadership had to be pushed to organise the first protest against the IR laws. The Labor Party and the ACTU have also tried to funnel the mass opposition to the laws into a campaign to re-elect Labor at the next election, even though Labor has refused to commit to renouncing individual contracts or to repealing all the anti-union laws other than Howard's WorkChoices legislation. But there has been mass working class support for a serious industrial and political campaign to resist these laws, which is producing contradictions within the ALP as governing party in all states and territories and as federal parliamentary opposition as well as within unions dominated by the ALP. Even after these laws are adopted, we can anticipate a series of struggles around their enforcement. Some unions are determined that they will continue to take industrial action, even though it will be illegal and their members and officials risk jail for doing so. Socialists have the duty to fight side-by-side with the militant trade unionists in these struggles to help the militant

minority current to grow and increase its preparedness to take independent initiatives in the face of these attacks, drawing in all those who want to act against these laws.

14. While the Australian working class is being forced into political action, it is too early to proclaim this as the end of the last two and a half decades of class retreat in the face of the capitalist neoliberal offensive. Our characterisation, at our last Congress, of the post-1998 political developments as the beginning of a turn in the working class struggle was over-optimistic. Certainly those developments marked a broadening legitimacy crisis of neoliberal politicians and the rise of some new political vanguards and the partial revival of advanced political elements that had previously retreated into relative inactivity. However, the working class as a whole remained generally on the retreat. The long 15-year capitalist expansion cycle (with all its contradictions) continued to dampen resistance to capitalist neoliberal reforms. While understanding that the post-1998 political developments did not mark the end of two and a half decades of class retreat, the scale of the 2005 ruling class offensive and the initial mass response against it means that there is the potential for a shift in the working class struggle which we need to be ready to respond to.

15. Having led the working class into retreat and having championed the neoliberal offensive against the social gains of previous working class struggles, the ALP has been facing a serious political crisis. Labor's ever more explicit shift

to the right – whether in government or in opposition – has opened up a space to its left that all serious socialists know we have to contend for. The replacement of Mark Latham by Kim Beazley destroyed the brief illusions sparked by Latham’s populist rhetoric and call for the withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq by Christmas 2004. Over time Labor’s shift to the right has created a deep structural crisis for the ALP—its activist base has been shrinking, aging and becoming more inactive, as dramatically exposed in former leader Latham’s memoirs. A growing section of the working class and other oppressed and victimised sections of society has continued to look for a political alternative to the major parties. At the same time, the viciousness of the Howard government’s attack is leading some unionists who don’t trust the Labor Party and oppose the Labor Party’s reactionary support for mandatory detention of refugees and the “anti-terrorism” legislation” to join the ALP despite these bi-partisan positions. Labor’s focus on opposition to the Howard WorkChoices legislation — even as it supports the Howard government’s “anti-terrorism” laws — is aimed at reconsolidating its support base.

16. As the ALP stands increasingly exposed, the Greens have filled most of the opening electoral space. However the Greens have not filled the space opened up by the crisis of leadership in the trade unions and the broader labour movement, especially given the vital challenges of the struggle against Howard’s anti-union laws.

17. At the same time winning the working class away from its traditional Labor misleadership requires a lot more than exposing the ALP’s betrayals. Indeed, today socialists are hard-pressed to keep up with the ALP politicians’ relentless self-exposure! However, if disillusioned-in-Labor workers are to rise above despair, cynicism, and apathy they have to see a viable alternative political vehicle (or at least one in construction), an organisation which shows practical leadership on the issues that matter for them.

## **Changes to DSP perspectives in Socialist Alliance**

18. To create this alternative it is simply not enough for revolutionary socialists to hold up their political program and call for the support from these workers breaking from the ALP. Rather, our challenge is to unite with the actual leaders of the working-class resistance, fighting alongside them in a common effort to reverse the cycle of defeat and reinvigorate the movement. Through the Socialist Alliance, socialist politics occupies a greater portion of its potential political space than would otherwise be the case and has won a stronger hearing in the working class than it has enjoyed for decades. It remains the best available political vehicle to win over more militant trade union leaders and work more closely with a wider layer of working-class militants in the current political conditions. Socialists will continue to win more of the respect and confidence of these working class leaders and militants if we continue to struggle for a united socialist party.

19. However, our experience over the last two years forces us to recognize that the pace at which these two intertwined processes develop is slower than we anticipated and furthermore is dictated largely by the objective conditions beyond our control.

20. This reality has posed a change for the DSP’s perspectives for the Socialist Alliance. Our December 2003 resolution to integrate as much of the resources of the Democratic Socialist Party into the Socialist Alliance as possible was based on an over-estimation of the political conditions. This attempt at integration failed because the conditions to build the Socialist Alliance into a new party did not exist. To persist with such an integration plan would have jeopardised real gains of the socialist movement in this country, including its modest pool of revolutionary activists and Green Left Weekly, which in our estimate is an invaluable and indispensable political institution on the Australian left.

21. The Socialist Alliance will have to go through a more extended period of united campaigning and regroupment with broader left forces that are generated by a new upturn of resistance to the capitalist neoliberal “reforms” before it can harness the leadership resources and political confidence to take a significant step to creating a new socialist party. Nevertheless, for first time in many years many unionists look towards a left party project. By championing the need for a broadly based anti-capitalist party or a “new mass workers’ party” (as Craig Johnston put it at the Melbourne 2005 National Trade Union Fightback Conference) and by organizing the most united left intervention in the social movements, the Socialist Alliance can continue to win the respect of and recruit broader layers of militant workers to its ranks and in this way take practical steps along the road to such a party.

22. Green Left Weekly plays a critical role in this ongoing process of broader regroupment. For example, as a national newspaper, Green Left Weekly helps network and unite the militant trade unionists who are scattered across states and different unions and industries. Because there isn’t yet any party which unites all of the more militant unionists (some are Socialist Alliance members, some are still in the ALP, but most are not members of any party), a paper like Green Left Weekly can help bring such people together in a process which might eventually lead towards a more party-like formation.

23. The DSP will continue to make available meeting and organising space to the Socialist Alliance and will stand by the agreed protocols between Socialist Alliance and Green Left Weekly encouraging and securing greater access and input by the Socialist Alliance, its members and affiliates into Green Left Weekly; and placing the projection of the Socialist Alliance within Green Left Weekly in the hands of an editorial body that is accountable to and appointed by the Socialist Alliance. DSP members will also continue to politically organise together with other Socialist Alliance members through branches, caucuses, committees and working groups, wherever effective, in order to build the most united left political intervention possible and to build the Socialist Alliance.

24. In the meantime, the DSP has to continue to take urgent steps to replenish its cadre base and maintain the political, organisational and financial viability of its own structures. Socialist Alliance structures remain too loose and

weak to win, educate and train new socialist activists and the Socialist Alliance caucuses and working groups have only partially begun to organise united interventions into the movements. We need to recruit to the DSP from within and outside the Socialist Alliance and, primarily through Resistance, win, educate and develop a new generation of revolutionary youth cadre.

25. In short, the DSP has not been able, and cannot afford, to operate as a purely internal tendency in the Socialist Alliance. The DSP functions as a public revolutionary socialist organisation, while continuing to be affiliated to the Socialist Alliance, to build it and to seek to provide political leadership to it.

## **Our revolutionary perspective in the Socialist Alliance**

26. The DSP is a revolutionary socialist, Marxist, organisation. This means that the DSP is convinced that the socialist society for which the Socialist Alliance fights cannot be built unless the working class – which comprises the overwhelming majority in society today – conquers the power to make the decisions which are presently made by the corporate elites and those who govern for them. Only then will it be possible to put an end to inequality, injustice, poverty and oppression through the systematic and democratically-decided restructuring of all social relations.

27. For this transformation to take place, the vast majority of working people have to become conscious socialists – conscious of their own power as the productive majority of society and convinced, too, that the socialist alternative represents their interests and remains viable despite the perversions and crimes that Stalinism committed in its name. Such consciousness can only arise through working people participating in struggles to defend their own immediate interests and in solidarity with working people in struggle elsewhere.

28. But socialist consciousness cannot grow in the absence of socialist organisation – a mass revolutionary socialist party based in the working class. This is because socialist consciousness does not develop spontaneously. It has to be struggled for in the face of a capitalist class with immense and highly centralised military, financial, political and ideological power.

29. The experience of all mass working-class and popular struggle to overthrow capitalism and establish a socialist society – beginning with the Russian Revolution – confirms the following key lessons of the pioneering Bolshevik experience in this regard:

- \* Socialist consciousness and successful struggle is impossible without a revolutionary program for leading the class struggle to a revolutionary socialist conclusion;

- \* That program can only be developed and effectively applied by a party which – through its consistent political activity – can win a leadership or vanguard role in the working class;

- \* That party must be comprised of activists who carry out such a program and who agree with and are capable of working collectively (i.e. in a disciplined way) to advance it; and

- \* That party must have an internationalist perspective, understanding the role of imperialism and be firm in its goal of overthrowing its own ruling class.

30. However, neither in Australia nor anywhere can these features be decreed or conjured up. The revolutionary program, organisation and leadership have to be developed and tested in a real struggle to provide leadership to Australian workers in all the battles – economic, political and ideological – that they will face.

31. By the same token, the mass revolutionary socialist party in this country will never be built simply by the incremental growth of the existing small socialist propaganda groups. The road to such a party will be conditioned by the specific social conditions and political developments that emerge. Crucial in this process will be the consistent effort by the consciously revolutionary forces to win over and fuse with the leaderships that emerge in the working class.

32. The DSP continues to see the struggle to build a broadly based anti-capitalist party as a stage in the struggle for a mass revolutionary party in this country. This has been our view since our 11th Congress in January 1986, when we affirmed that: “Only the creation of a serious anti-capitalist alternative, necessarily founded on a complete break with Labor reformism, can open the way to working class victories in the struggle against the bosses’ attempts to make working people pay for the capitalist crisis. Revolutionaries therefore place a high priority on helping to develop such a political alternative – a broadly based party that consistently counterposes defence of the interests of the workers and their allies to the illusions of class peace fostered by the ALP and the trade union bureaucracy. The road to building such a political alternative lies along the line of seeking unity among all who are willing to break with Labor reformism and to encourage the most broadly based action in defence of the interests of workers and their allies.” (Resolution on “The ALP and the fight for socialism”, available in the pamphlet *Labor and the Fight for Socialism*). We are confident that, while such a broad left party necessarily begins with an incomplete class struggle platform and a broad socialist objective (i.e. does not have an explicitly revolutionary program), in the course of united engagement in mass struggles, it will steadily and democratically develop its program in a more explicitly revolutionary direction.

33. While the Socialist Alliance has adopted as its perspective transforming itself into a multi-tendency socialist party, this is just a beginning of such a new party project. If there is a new rise in the class struggle, new potential partners will be drawn into the project for a new party and the Socialist Alliance may have to become part of or be transformed into or be supplanted by new structures for best organising the strongest political voice for anti-neoliberal resistance.

34. In accordance with the perspectives outlined above the objectives of the DSP within Socialist Alliance are as follows:

\* To build the Socialist Alliance as a campaigning alliance in the social movements (particularly the trade union movement) that seeks to build, in actions and in words, a new mass workers' party because the greater political unity, confidence and active commitment required to advance this new party project will be forged through such collective struggle;

\* To promote internationalism and comradely collaboration between the Socialist Alliance and socialist organisations in other countries on the basis of solidarity and mutual non-interference;

\* To win other Socialist Alliance members to revolutionary socialism; and

\* To provide revolutionary socialist political leadership within the Socialist Alliance.

The DSP will pursue these aims and objectives within the democratic framework of the Socialist Alliance.

35. We are totally open about our revolutionary politics and seek to win others in the Socialist Alliance to it. Those comrades with whom we work now – and the many more who will join the Socialist Alliance in the future – will always know where the DSP is coming from. It will not seek to trick them into collaboration by hiding its revolutionary perspective.

## **Proposal for a campaign of general strike agitation**

*Shane Bentley (Sydney West branch and MUA member)*

### **Introduction**

November 15 saw over 600,000 people take part in the ACTU national day of protest against Howard's "WorkChoices" anti-union laws.

Nevertheless the Liberal-National coalition have already pushed this legislation through the House of Representatives and look set to ram it through the Senate within days.

Both the November 15 and June 30-July 1 national days of protest were impressive events. But the current ACTU strategy of calling a national protest once every few months will not stop Howard from implementing and using these laws – let alone force him to repeal them.

Howard's attacks pose the need for general strike action. Many workers already see that the ACTU strategy is inadequate and understand the need for a serious campaign of industrial action.

This article will argue that the Socialist Alliance must

a) start a campaign of agitation for 24-hour general strike action;

b) make this campaign SA's number one priority over the next few months.

### **Rationale**

1) "WorkChoices", the Building and Construction Industry Improvement Bill and the other parts of Howard's anti-worker, anti-union legislation are the most vicious attack on working people ever seen in this country.

They are comparable in scope to the wave of anti-union legislation that British Tory PM Thatcher passed in the 1980s and the NZ National Party's Employment Contracts Act of 1991. Both represented serious defeats for the working class of these countries.

Howard's across the board attacks on all sections of workers poses the need for a sustained, across the board fightback. The objective situation poses the need for general strike action to overturn these laws.

2) The first reaction from ACTU leaders to these laws was an essentially defeatist one.

For example, ACTU secretary Greg Combet told the ABC's *7.30 Report* (February 17, 2005): "I am not in the business of [proclaiming war] or talking about industrial action". "Howard's laws ultimately will go through . . . It will be a very tough system . . . but we will have to work within it".

It was pressure from the ranks of the union movement that led to the large June 30-July 1 and November 15 protests. The first organised expression of this was the Victorian Trades Hall Council March 23 1200-strong mass delegates meeting that voted for a June 30 half-day strike and rally.

A few token national days of protest and mass video hookup meetings will not stop Howard's onslaught.

So far, pressure from below has forced ACTU leaders to call two national days of protest. It can potentially force the heads of the trade union bureaucracy to do so much more.

3) The "militant union current" (primarily Victorian left union leaders – Kingham, O'Neill etc.) has pushed the Combet/Burrow ACTU leadership to take action.

Their calls for mass delegates meetings that help to organise larger demonstrations and stoppages on the days of national protest are obviously useful (compare Melbourne's 250,000 to Sydney's 45,000).

As big as the one-off demonstrations that the Victorian Trades Hall Council etc. organize, they will not stop Howard and Co. from putting his anti-union laws in place and using them against the union movement.

Similar huge demonstrations took place against Jeff Kennett in the early 1990s. His anti-union laws were put in place nevertheless.

The approach of the "militant union current" as it presently stands does not represent a fundamental brake with the conservative ACTU approach.

4) A broad layer of workers generally understand:

the significance and severity of the attacks launched by Howard;

the inadequacy of the ACTU leaders' current approach;

the need for a campaign of serious industrial action to overturn these laws.

This can be seen by the spontaneous calls that have been heard around the country for a 24-hour general strike.

This broad layer of workers would be the target audience for a campaign of Socialist Alliance agitation for general strike action.

Such a campaign could win the affiliation or sympathy of numbers of militant unionists to the Socialist Alliance. More importantly, it could also spur them into action.

### **Socialist Alliance material to date**

Recent Socialist Alliance propaganda has not been very specific about the kind of action needed to defeat Howard's anti-union laws.

For example "Exposed: Howard's lies about his anti-union laws" (yellow leaflet) says that "union action should begin with a coordinated national stoppage, and protest rallies, before the bill is introduced in parliament. This nationwide action can be organised through mass delegates' meetings in all cities and towns".

The leaflet for November 15 ("Here's how the little liar can be beaten") refers to the VTHC and Unions WA initiative for "mass delegates' meetings to organise solidarity action if a union is prosecuted". There is also the call to "follow up November 15 with another nationwide protest early in the New Year" and turning May Day 2006 into a mass protest.

Leaving aside the question of timing, these calls for coordinated national stoppages and protest rallies can mean all things to all people.

Is Socialist Alliance calling for more November 15-style rallies where different unions and state bodies take differing lengths of stop-work action (if they take any at all)? Or are we calling for a general strike? Socialist Alliance propaganda needs to be more specific with an explicit demand for a 24-hour general strike.

### **24-hour general strike – how?**

A 24-hour general strike – as part of a sustained campaign of industrial action – is needed in order to overturn Howard's "WorkChoices" legislation. But is it possible?

ACTU and union leaders will fight tooth and nail to ensure that a 24-hour general strike does not happen. We only have to look across the Tasman to see how far union bureaucrats will go to quash any sentiment for such action\*.

Nevertheless pressure from below can force their hand.

There are three broad scenarios of how general strike action could take place.

1) Motions for general strike action win so much support at the workplace, delegate meetings, union branch and the lower leadership level that union and ACTU leaders feel compelled to call such action.

2) Under rank and file pressure, one or more unions break from the ACTU fold and decide to call their own union-wide strike action, thus putting pressure on other unions and the ACTU to do likewise.

3) One or more spontaneous unofficial ("wildcat") strikes break out and threaten to spread like a rash across the country [The classic example here is France in May-June 1968. Unofficial stoppages and demands for a 24-hour general strike also followed the sacking of Whitlam in November 1975].

Any general strike action that did occur would probably take place as some partial combination of all three scenarios.

The recent general strikes in Belgium provide an example. The smaller social-democratic union federation held a successful 24-hour general strike on October 7. That and the number of wildcat strikes that broke out soon after pressured the larger Christian union federation to call a joint October 28 24-hour general strike with the social-democratic union federation.

Of course, if the ACTU leadership is forced to call such action, they will try to do it on their terms so it can be contained and defused by them.

The Socialist Alliance agitation campaign needs to take all of this into account.

### **Content of agitation - "Strike Howard out!"**

The main slogans of Socialist Alliance agitation would be "Strike Howard out!" and "24-hour nationwide general strike to defeat anti-union laws".

A subheading such as "All workers - All industries - All unions - All out!" could also be used to explain exactly what is meant by a general strike.

Agitation for general strike action will need to include the following points:

a) A brief explanation of Howard's anti-worker laws, emphasising the nature of these laws as an attack on all workers – organized and unorganized – that requires a united response from all workers.

b) That the present ACTU campaign will not overturn these laws and that these laws could have been stopped earlier with a serious campaign of industrial action;

c) That it is not too late to stop Howard. That these laws can still be overturned with an ongoing campaign of coordinated national strike action across all industries and unions (a general strike);

d) That rank and file pressure has already forced the ACTU to call two successful days of action (June 30-July 1 and November 15).

e) That one way to exert pressure is to move motions in favour of a 24-hour general strike at the workplace, stop work meeting, union branch etc. (add model motions to our agitation).

f) That appealing to ACTU leaders to call such action is important – but not enough. The general strike action that is required to defeat Howard would need to take place whether or not it has ACTU backing;

g) The need for workers to form rank and file strike committees – within both workplaces and unions – to make this a reality. Forming such committees and linking them up with others across localities and industries is the best way to involve the mass of non- and poorly unionised workers and gives us the best chance of success.

h) That workers must demand that the Labor Party pledge to totally repeal Howard's new anti-worker laws. Nevertheless the ALP cannot be relied on to repeal these laws once elected, (add examples of Labo(ur) from NZ and Britain), Beazley wants to keep AWA's etc.;

i) That the ALP's weak opposition highlights the need for workers to form their own party - a workers party. Socialist Alliance will work with all those who share this aim etc.

## **Methods of agitation**

### **1) Leaflets and Posters**

Leafleting will be the main focus of our agitation campaign. Obviously Socialist Alliance members will leaflet and talk up the campaign at their place of work.

But we also want to reach out to other areas and industry sectors where we have little influence in order to test the waters.

While the traditional Saturday morning stalls are useful, Socialist Alliance members will need to organise mass leafleting drives.

Factory and warehouse entrances, railway stations, bus depots, hospitals, schools and shopping centres will all need to be leafleted.

Socialist Alliance branches could target a few local factories and warehouses etc. based on size of the plant, recent (if any) strike activity etc.

Perhaps a petition addressed to the ACTU calling for a 24-hour general strike could also be part of our campaigning at the workplace, on stalls and when mass leafleting.

Large, bold posters (similar to some of the previous large red and white ones) with the various slogans and web addresses could be produced. Postering will need to spread out beyond the usual run of inner-city haunts and suburban main streets to industrial areas, intersections of main roads etc.

### **2) Motions to union meetings**

Socialist Alliance members have already had some success putting various motions to different union bodies. While some have called for a 24-hour general strike for early 2006, others have been a bit ambiguous as to the nature of any upcoming union action.

A plan of attack that targets 'left' unions, areas where we have influence etc. needs to be mapped out and closely followed up.

### **3) Press**

The press of the Socialist Alliance affiliates (*Green Left Weekly*, *Socialist Worker* etc.) should be used to raise the demand for national strike action and report on all successful moves in that direction.

These papers should also run a regular series of reports, interviews and historical articles about both recent general strikes and those of the past.

These articles can also be condensed and used as examples of general strike action in future agitational leaflets.

The successes (and failures) of the past can demonstrate that general strike agitation is not just a nice idea, but a recipe for success.

Examples abound. Recent ones include:

- \* October 7 and 28, 2005 – Belgian general strikes against retirement/ pension attacks.
- \* October 4, 2005 - French national strike (a leader of the Trotskyist LCR or LO could be interviewed)
- \* July 15, 2005 - One-day 500,000 strong public sector strike in Portugal
- \* October 24, 2003 – 10 million strong four hour Italian general strike against Berlusconi pension “reform”
- \* May 2003 – 2 million French workers take to the streets against public sector pension “reform”
- \* June 18, 2002 – 500,000 Greek workers in general strike against PASOK pension cuts
- \* April 16, 2002 – 11 million strong one day Italian general strike against Berlusconi's anti-union laws.

Others include (and these are far from exhaustive):

- \* 1995 – WA Liberal's “second wave” stopped
- \* 1995 – The wave of strikes that swept France
- \* 1991 – The fight against the NZ National's Employment Contracts Act (general strike demanded by many)
- \* 1991 – The fight against the NSW Greiner Liberal government's anti-union laws
- \* 1984-5 – The British miners' strike (sold out by TUC refusal to call general strike)
- \* 1976 - ACTU 24-hour stoppage against Fraser's attacks on Medicare
- \* 1969 - The fight to free Victorian Tramway union leader Clarrie O'Shea
- \* 1968 – The French May-June general strike
- \* 1936 – France (again)
- \* 1926 – The British General Strike

#### 4) New website

Socialist Alliance should set up a specific website – such as [www.strike-howard-out.org](http://www.strike-howard-out.org) - that can play the role of a “one-stop shop” for the 24-hour general strike.

Model motions, petitions, stickers and the latest leaflets in downloadable PDF form can be regularly added.

People reading one of our leaflets for the first time would be encouraged not only to download copies of further and / or new leaflets, petitions etc. to pass around at work. They can also report their success stories to the website to be published in future leaflets (anonymously if need be).

### Can a Socialist Alliance agitation campaign work?

In the right situation, the general strike agitation of small, resource poor leftist organisations can – and has - exercised a real influence on the course of events.

The Socialist Workers Organisation (NZ) ran a campaign of general strike agitation campaign in 1991 against the National’s Employment Contracts Act\*\*. With less than 100 members and a handful of links to job delegate networks and sympathetic union organisers, they distributed 60,000 leaflets calling for a mass fightback to “kill the bill” across NZ.

The rank and file started to demand general strike action. A NZ Public Service Association (PSA) conference saw a resolution for a national stoppage carried by 45,000 card votes to 15,000 against.

The April 1991 NZ Council of Trade Unions saw a motion for an 24-hour general stoppage on April 30 narrowly defeated on a card vote - 250,122 against and 190,910 in favour. New Zealand workers are still suffering the effects of the NZ CTU’s cowardice.

The book *Leon Trotsky On France* refers to over twelve months of general strike agitation by the small group of French Trotskyists that played a role in the June 1936 general strike that involved 2 million workers.

Obviously the February 12, 1934 general strike called by the CGT union federation in response to a far-right putsch was fresh in workers’ minds.

However in 1936 the organisations that held sway over French workers - the CGT, the French Socialists (SFIO) and the Communists (PCF) – all opposed the call for a general strike. Nonetheless a wave of factory occupations broke out that shook the newly elected Popular Front government to its foundations.

### Conclusion

The agitation of small left-wing organisations for general strike action can make a difference. There is not only the need for such action to overturn Howard’s laws - this need is becoming increasingly clear to more and more working people.

There is of course no guarantee that Socialist Alliance agitation for a 24-hour general strike will achieve the desired result. At the minimum we can make the price that the ACTU pays for not calling such action that little bit higher.

More importantly, such a campaign would win us the increased respect, sympathy and affiliation of militant workers. No small achievement in itself.

**Please direct any feedback about this proposal (both positive and negative) to me at [vigilancebulletin@hotmail.com](mailto:vigilancebulletin@hotmail.com).**

\* See “Anti-union laws: New Zealand’s bitter experience”, *Green Left Weekly* # 645 ([www.greenleft.org.au](http://www.greenleft.org.au)).

\*\* See “The Struggle last time: Rolling general strikes to ‘kill the bill’”, *Unity* June 2005 ([www.socialist-worker.org](http://www.socialist-worker.org)).

## The Socialist Alliance – Going nowhere since the Conference?

*By Carlene Wilson (Wills branch and Workers Power)*

After the June National Conference of the Socialist Alliance, Workers Power wrote the following assessment of the Conference and by inference, the future of the Alliance as a whole. Our outlook was not a positive one. The Conference had, in direct contrast to the union gathering that had preceded it, been a rather narrow event, without the usual attempts to accommodate diversity and difference. It was clear to us that the largest affiliate, the Democratic Socialist perspective had grown tired of having to compromise with other affiliates and was prepared to use organisational means to get the “unity” they had not been able to force through political argument.

The last few months have, we think, shown that this assessment was reasonable. Socialist Alliances profile has declined and on the IR laws the Socialist Alliance propaganda (and that of the DSP) have done little but tail the left union leaders and in some cases the ACTU.

Workers Power are still members of the Socialist Alliance but we have deep concerns for the ability of the organisation to give a real socialist, political lead in the current period of massive class wide attacks.

We present this as a contribution to what is an ongoing discussion about the way forward for political representation for the Australian working class.

The recent Socialist Alliance conference made some decisive changes to the way the SA will operate. Essentially the Democratic Socialist Perspective have succeeded in pushing through their own agenda. That agenda seems to be not much more than building a slightly larger, slightly more diverse DSP but one which carries the SA name and the legitimacy that this has.

The DSP have a perspective for the Socialist Alliance that it be something like the Scottish Socialist Party – an organisation which does contain different tendencies but which has one public face and one paper. For their purposes, they want the Green left Weekly to be that paper.

This led to some extremely dishonest debate at the Conference. DSP members argued that the GLW was already seen by many people as the paper of the Socialist Alliance. While they would not go so far as arguing openly that the paper should immediately be re-badged as the SA paper, they were clear that this is the direction they continue to want to go in.

On the surface a fairly straightforward argument – but what it covers is the continuous attempt by the DSP to cover political differences with organisational solutions. The SA needs a paper if it is to be taken seriously as a party, so rather than dealing with the difficult questions of what politics such a paper would carry or how it would be structured, they want to simply substitute their own paper.

There is a serious political problem with this which serves as an example of the much wider political problems inside the SA. A paper is the political organ of a party – it carries the party's political line – its plan for how to move forward in the class struggle. It is the written expression of a party's idea of socialism and its plan for getting there.

But as most people in the Socialist Alliance acknowledge – the SA currently has many interpretations of what is socialism and even more of how the working class is going to get there. This means that we could not agree on a full political programme for the SA.

At its first Conference Workers Power proposed a revolutionary political programme for the SA. It was a programme of transitional demands which argued for how we could fight and win the current demands of the class as part of the struggle for socialism. It did not leave out the need for a workers government and for the need for the working class to overthrow the capitalist class, take power and begin to build socialism.

That programme was resoundingly voted down at the first Conference. We were told it was too early to be building a party and that any organisation that was built needed to have the broadest possible programme. This was for a number of reasons. Firstly we were told that the working class in Australia is not ready for revolutionary politics and would be scared away by such a programme. But this argument covered a much deeper reason – the fact that some of the groups that formed the SA already saw themselves as that party or at least its nucleus. And deeper still was the fact that no one wanted to adopt any sort of thorough-going programme because that would have meant having to actually debate and sort out the differences that have kept us all in separate organisations to begin with.

It is a common idea among those who consider themselves to be left-wing but are not members of one of the socialist groups that all we need is for the left to get together and things will improve and that the differences that keep groups apart are petty or personal or matters of some sort of sectarian pride. The truth is that if we had the same politics, if we agreed about the way forward for the working class in Australia there would be no need for the SA because we would already be in the same organisation.

But the differences that divide us are real. And this is seen most clearly in the compromise that was eventually settled on to be the programme of the SA. This is not a real socialist political programme in the usual sense of the word. It is a series of progressive sounding demands – all of which most people in the SA can agree on. But it is not a programme because it is not linked to the kind of action, the kind of organisation, the structures and the political goals that the working class needs to actually win any of the demands.

Without an agreed programme and with the unwillingness to debate it, there was no politics on which to build an organ – a paper. Which leaves us with the DSP wanting to substitute their paper to fill the gap.

And this is the real dishonesty. While the DSP continue to claim that the GLW is the paper of the movement not their organisation, it consistently carries their political line, has an editorial board made up of their leading cadre, is staffed, funded and written for by their members and acts as their organisations organ in the working class.

So when DSP members tell the SA Conference that ordinary people who they sell to think the GLW is the paper of the SA rather than the DSP and that they are happy continuing with this misunderstanding they are effectively politically defrauding both the rest of the SA and the workers they sell to. This is because despite the four pages of coverage of SA events that the GLW contains it still carries the political line not of the SA but of the DSP. If the DSP are selling this paper to people and letting them think it contains the politics of the SA then they are lying to everyone.

The other major changes were to the way the SA's leadership is structured. The DSP wanted to push through a model of a much tighter, more homogeneous leadership. Essentially this was an attempt to further dominate the leadership of SA. Already the DSP almost always had a majority on the National Executive, but the new leadership gives them six of fifteen positions, with at least two more positions held by people who have shown themselves to be their political co-thinkers. This much smaller and tighter leadership left less room for the diversity of opinion within the SA and effectively closed out the smaller political affiliates.

The DSP argued for this model with their usual refrain of “those who work should lead.” This concept whilst sounding very democratic covers the fact that already as the largest organised group within the SA, the DSP have always had the resources to do much more of the work of the SA. With full-timers, offices and access to other resources the DSP have been able to take on a greater amount of the day to day work than smaller affiliates or individuals. But

having the resources does not mean that you also have the best politics. In fact running about doing lots of activism also doesn't mean you have the best politics – just the most amount of time in which to put your politics into action.

In the end the DSP's argument comes down to not so much those who work hard, but those who have the most resources, time and people lead.

The same thing is expressed in their emphasis on one person, one vote. Again a democratic concept on the surface which hides the truth behind what they are saying. The DSP like to emphasise the number of people that voted for particular resolutions. What they are not explaining is the way Conference was essentially stacked with their members. And the DSP is not a loose organisation with diverse politics like the SA – it is a disciplined cadre organisation – effectively this means a bloc vote at the Conference. This in itself is not undemocratic – if the DSP can convince and organise people to vote in a disciplined fashion with its politics – good on them. The problem is the lack of openness about this. One person, one vote ignores the fact that for DSP members it is one organisation, many votes.

The previous method of electing a leadership for the SA acknowledged this fact by automatically giving organised political groups representation on the leadership – the two largest affiliates getting more representatives than the smaller ones – and with a majority set aside for members of the SA who were not members of any affiliate. While this system had its own problems, not the least being the somewhat unwieldy size of the National Executive, it did recognise the fact that as members of affiliates we will vote with our affiliates line but also that those who actually have a definite political line – are effectively a tendency in the SA – need to have that line represented.

The DSP want to have the facade of an individual membership organisation while maintaining underneath that the disciplined structures of their cadre party. Again – its fine for the DSP to be a disciplined party – good on them for having built such an organisation – but they need to be open and honest with the majority of the membership of the SA about what is actually going on.

The question becomes what sort of organisation do people want the SA to be. We were told, up till this most recent conference that the plan was to build a multi-tendency socialist party. This is not a perspective that Workers Power particularly agrees with, though it is certainly one that makes more sense to us than the concept of an extended electoral united front.

From the very beginning we have argued that what the working class in Australia needs is a new workers party – a party which we would argue needs a revolutionary programme if it is to be successful. But a party where structure and most importantly programme would have to be debated out with our whole class not just the small, self-selected membership of the SA. We've argued though that the SA could be the force which argues for the building of such a party and which uses its good name and its networks of activists to get such a party off the ground.

The fact is though whatever we, or any of the other affiliates or individuals wanted, the SA has been a united front. It has been one that stands in elections, plans and operates in campaigns and produces some propaganda – though usually propaganda that has been made less sharp by the fact that it has always had to be a compromise between the very different politics of the people that make that United Front up.

The problem with the multi-tendency socialist party line that the DSP had previously been supporting is that in the months leading up to the Conference it became clear that the main non-aligned people who had originally pushed this line now had a different interpretation of its intent than the one the DSP had developed.

In fact by the end of the Conference it was clear that the DSP did not really want a party with multiple tendencies at all – in fact they set up a ticket for the STV election that left out anyone who didn't totally agree with them. This is not the recipe for the kind of internal democracy that the previous MTSP models had relied on. In fact the DSP argued strongly against their ex-allies in the Non-Aligned Caucus who were trying to institute a more open model for the MTSP. Effectively the DSP have set up a single tendency socialist party where they are allowing the rest of us to come along for the ride as long as we agree to their leadership, to use their paper and to support their politics.

And all of this amidst the most outrageous slanders on the rest of the affiliates. At one point a leading member of the DSP argued that the previous method of electing the National Leadership allowed for backdoor dealings, while another suggested that retaining the previous leadership structure meant allowing the organisation to be led by the Wills branch. Of course the system that the DSP pushed for meant that the SA instead is led from Abercrombie St.