

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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Relative privilege, protectionism and immigration controls

By Chris Slee (Wills branch)

In general Australian workers are much better off than workers in third world countries.

For example, 53.4% of workers in Indonesia earn less than \$2 per day (according to Dita Sari, speaking at the 2005 Asia/Pacific Conference). In Australia most full-time workers would earn at least \$100 per day.

Even an “unskilled” worker in Australia is usually paid much more than a worker doing a similar job in Indonesia or China.

There are some exceptions. Some workers in Australia have living standards comparable with third world workers (e.g. outworkers in the clothing industry, Aboriginal workers on CDEP projects). Conversely, there are some highly skilled workers in third world countries who have a standard of living comparable with workers in the advanced capitalist countries (e.g. skilled workers in Venezuela's oil industry).

But in general the working class in imperialist countries such as Australia is privileged compared to workers in third world countries.

This relative privilege is the objective basis for working class support for immigration controls, as well as for protectionism. Australian workers (like workers in other imperialist countries) fear to lose their relative privileges compared to workers in third world countries.

They fear that workers from overseas, accustomed to lower pay rates than Australian workers, will come and take their jobs. This was one of the reasons why most Australian workers in the past supported the White Australia Policy, and today support an immigration policy that is formally non-racist, but still severely limits the number of people who can come to Australia from third world countries.

Workers also fear that work will be shifted from Australian workplaces to overseas workplaces, either because their existing employer itself decides to shift production overseas, or because their existing employer is unable to compete with imported products and goes bankrupt.

In some cases bosses do actually transfer production overseas and sack all or part of their Australian workforce. In other cases, the threat to do so is a tactic used by an employer to intimidate its Australian workforce into accepting cuts to pay and conditions.

Sometimes the threat is a bluff. It is not always practical or profitable for capitalists to shift production to a country with lower wages. There are a variety of reasons for this.

If the goods are to be sold in Australia, the additional transport costs and delay in delivery may outweigh the savings from lower wages in the production process.

Setting up a factory in a third world country may require sharing part of the profit with local business partners and/or with corrupt government officials. Some types of skilled workers may not be available in the third world country. In some poor countries, power supplies and other infrastructure are unreliable. The fear of political turmoil may be a factor deterring a shift of production to a third world country.

It should also be noted that when production is transferred out of Australia, it is not always to a third world country. Production may be transferred to another imperialist country, perhaps motivated by a desire to be closer to a larger market. (e.g. Europe or America)

Nevertheless, the transfer of production to third-world countries with lower pay rates does happen often enough to make Australian workers worried.

Thus the relative privilege of workers in imperialist countries such as Australia has a big impact on their political attitudes. This is true not only for the better-off sections of the Australian working class, but also for the lower paid sections.

One of the areas most affected by the transfer of production to low-wage countries is the textile clothing and footwear (TCF) industry. TCF workers are among the lowest paid in Australia. In Australian terms they are far from being a “labour aristocracy”. But those Australian TCF workers who still have a job in a unionised factory (and have not been forced into outwork) are much better paid than TCF workers in China or Indonesia. Thus they feel vulnerable to threats to shift work offshore.

Tariffs

Traditionally Australian unions in the manufacturing sector have fought for tariff protection for Australian industry. By making imported goods more expensive when sold in Australia, tariffs make it easier for products made in Australia to compete on the Australian domestic market.

But tariff protection has been cut markedly over the past 30 years. This has contributed to the closure of many factories.

The government's declared aim in cutting tariffs has been to make Australian industry more competitive on the world market. Australian companies, instead of relying on a domestic market protected by tariff barriers, are supposed to compete on the global market, selling more and more goods overseas.

This has happened in some cases. But other companies have been unable to compete on the world market and have gone bankrupt.

Some Australian companies have taken advantage of the tariff cuts to transfer all or part of their production overseas, importing the products of their overseas factories back into Australia.

One of the aims of the tariff cuts was in fact to weaken the Australian trade union movement by making it easier for employers to transfer production overseas, or to threaten to do so and thereby intimidate workers into accepting worse pay and conditions.

This kind of thing is not confined to manufacturing industry. White-collar work is now being transferred overseas. Companies such as Telstra are outsourcing work in areas such as information technology and call centres to countries such as India.

Socialist solutions

One of our longer-term goals should be to equalise pay and conditions on a world scale, by raising the living standards of workers in the third world (rather than by cutting the pay and conditions of workers in the imperialist countries).

Furthermore, we want to introduce production for need rather than for profit on a world scale. This would enable jobs for all, in both the former imperialist countries and in the former third world countries.

While we should propagandise for this socialist vision, we also need to put forward some more immediate proposals.

1. Support third world workers

Australian unions should assist workers in third world countries to form strong unions that can fight for better wages and working conditions. We should also support political parties that fight for democratic rights, including the right to form unions and to strike.

2. Joint union campaigns

Australian workers should make contact with workers employed by the same company overseas, with a view to setting common minimum standards of pay, conditions and union rights, and taking united action in solidarity with any group of workers under attack.

3. Open the books

When faced with the threat to transfer production overseas and sack Australian workers, unions need to find out whether the threat is real, or whether it is a bluff to intimidate workers from defending and improving their pay and conditions.

Unions should demand access to all company reports, feasibility studies etc regarding the possible transfer of production. They should demand to know the pay, conditions, and hours of work of the workers in the overseas workplace (or the proposed conditions in the proposed workplace). They should demand to know if the company has negotiated, or proposes to negotiate, an agreement with a union in the other country. If so, it should make contact with that union. In either case, they should make contact with unions known to exist in the other country.

4. Retraining and new jobs

If a workplace is closed or jobs are cut, unions should demand guarantees of new jobs, of a kind acceptable to the workers. Depending on circumstances, the demands for retraining and new jobs could be put on the company, the government or both.

5. Nationalisation

Unions should demand the nationalisation of companies that threaten to sack workers. They should demand that the nationalised enterprises be run by the government on the basis of production for need, not profit.

In the present climate it is unlikely that any Australian government (Labor or Liberal) will act on this demand. But this can change. In the past, capitalist governments have indeed nationalised certain enterprises (usually with compensation to the former owners) for a number of reasons, including the need to contain worker discontent. For example, the British Labour government nationalised the coalmines after the second world war. In Australia, the Victorian government took over the electricity supply industry in the 1920s. We should aim to put nationalisation back on the agenda.

The example of Venezuela, which has nationalised companies that closed down and sacked workers, should be widely publicised.

Immigration

The fear that immigrants will be used as cheap labour should be countered by recruiting them to unions and insisting that they be paid the same as other workers doing the same job.

In recent years, with the rise of the environmental movement, there has been a rise of environmental arguments for limiting immigration. Those who put forward these views argue that population growth is the main cause of environmental problems. Hence they say that limiting population growth is the key to saving Australia's environment. Immigration restrictions will supposedly enable Australians to have a good environment, even if the environment deteriorates in the rest of the world.

Those advocating these views want Australians to have a relatively privileged environment compared to the rest of the world.

Our response

Some environmental problems (e.g. global warming) can only be solved on a world scale. Limiting immigration to Australia won't help with these problems.

Other problems occur on a national scale (e.g. water shortage). But this does not mean that population control is the only or the best solution.

Australia's problems with water have little to do with population. Most water is used in agriculture. And since most agricultural products are sold on the world market, Australia's population has very little effect on the amount of water used.

A lot of water is wasted in irrigated agriculture. Water evaporates or soaks into the soil from open channels before it reaches the crops. These channels should be replaced with pipes.

Rice and cotton production in semi-desert areas uses enormous amounts of water. Production of these crops should be cut back and replaced by more suitable crops.

Conclusion

Australian workers, and the Australian population generally, have traditionally seen their living standards and environment as being dependent on the maintenance of relative privilege compared to the people of the third world. We need to argue for global solutions to both economic and environmental problems, while also finding solutions to the immediate problems of Australian workers and the Australian environment.

Volunteers needed—to help *Seeing Red* to help Socialist Alliance (and the left)

By Dick Nichols (Seeing Red managing editor)

After four issues of *Seeing Red* it's clear that a good swathe of progressive and left souls in this country appreciate the magazine and value its existence. They like its variety, the seriousness of its approach to its content (especially its "organising themes"), its look and—at times—its sense of humour.

The magazine is also a product that Socialist Alliance members can show to new acquaintances as proof of what the Alliance is capable. It takes its place alongside other left and progressive magazines in Australia, such as *Overland*, *Arena* and *Dissent* and it provides a depth of treatment not possible in left publications more directly oriented to day-to-day politics.

However, what success the magazine has had to date is still rather small compared to its unfulfilled potential. And a lot more of that potential will have to be realised if *Seeing Red* is to sustain itself as a "culture medium" for Socialist Alliance and a broader left.

The distribution and finance figures included as Appendices A and B to this article show how much the project is falling short of sustainability. They confirm what we have known for some time—that total paid sales per issue will have to increase by about 400 for the magazine to break even. Yet between subscriptions, Socialist Alliance branch sales and commercial distribution this goal should be readily attainable.

Critical here is the commitment and activity of Socialist Alliance members in support of Seeing Red— increased commercial distribution will help but we can't expect it to save us. A higher collective participation in distributing, writing for and criticising the magazine alone will bring home the bacon.

This article outlines the ways in which Alliance members can make their contribution.

Distribution

At present *Seeing Red* is distributed in four ways, via (i) Socialist Alliance branch and other sales (about 60 per cent of the total), (ii) subscriptions (about 15 per cent), (iii) commercial sales organised through Europress (about 15 per cent) and (iv) commercial sales organised through Socialist Alliance state and regional commercial distribution agents (about 10 per cent). (For the name of the Socialist Alliance commercial distribution agent in your area see Appendix C.)

(i) Socialist Alliance sales

The experience of local Socialist Alliance branches in selling *Seeing Red* is mixed. Predictably enough, if it's just left on the local branch sales table it sells at a much lower rate than when a comrade takes it upon him or herself (or is even organised!) to work the crowd.

When this is done the sales rate usually skyrockets. An example: comrade Jude Moreton (Canberra branch) who always makes a point of selling the magazine at demonstrations.

Opportunity: If each Socialist Alliance branch had one comrade who kept an eye on *Seeing Red* sales openings in their area and promote one-on-one sales, the magazine would be well on the way to reaching its break-even point.

By now, however, branches aren't the only basic organisational unit of Socialist Alliance with a chance to expand *Seeing Red* sales. The emergence of caucuses and working groups around areas of political intervention can provide lucrative possibilities for sales, especially if the issue in question covers themes of concern to those among whom Socialist Alliance comrades are intervening.

A recent example: comrade Peter Curtis of the Teachers Alliance in Victoria made a special effort to get issue 3, whose "organising thread" was education, sold to fellow teachers.

Opportunity: If each Socialist Alliance working group or caucus had one comrade who kept an eye on *Seeing Red* sales, we would not only increase the penetration of Socialist Alliance ideas and campaigns, but also be in a better position to know what copy our (potential) readership wants to see (and potentially contribute).

(ii) Subscriptions

Subscriptions are the great unexploited area of *Seeing Red* distribution. This is because:

We are still only beginning to tap the networks (academic, union, social movements) that would readily yield subscriptions;

The great majority of Socialist Alliance members themselves have yet to take out a subscription; and

We have not had the time and resources to date to organise a proper subscription campaign.

In future I am sure that the *Seeing Red* Editorial Board will ask the Socialist Alliance National Executive to consider organising a *Seeing Red* subscription campaign. In the meantime, Socialist Alliance members have many opportunities to pursue subscriptions for *Seeing Red*.

For example, comrade Julie Sloggett (Canterbury-Bankstown branch) has decided to do a mail-out to her network of post-graduate student associations, including a copy of the first issue (of which we printed many to be available as samples for future distribution campaigns). Julie recently informed the Canterbury-Bankstown egroup: “I have been giving out back issues of *Seeing Red* to those lecturers and staff that I know are sympathetic to SA’s ideological viewpoint, and have had fantastic feedback ... Quite a few have asked about either subscribing, submitting articles or both, so things are going well ... I will start handing them around at postgrad seminars and also sending them out to the other members of the Researchers’ list and see what we pick up from there.”

Opportunity: What about investigating your local community or campus library re subscribing to *Seeing Red*? What about arranging for ad for *Seeing Red* to be published in your community/movement group newsletter? What about doing a mail-out of a complimentary copy of the magazine to likely subscribers to the magazine? (Contact our national distribution manager Andy Giannotis at seeingreddistribution@socialist-alliance.org if you need help with this.)

In coming weeks the joint subscriptions rates agreed to by the Socialist Alliance National Conference will also come into effect. Among Socialist Alliance members whose membership is coming up for renewal this is an opportunity to start a reduced-rate *Seeing Red* subscription with their membership renewal.

Opportunity: Next time your branch or state/territory committee does its ring-around for membership renewal (or mentions it in its newsletter), make sure the joint offer of the *Seeing Red* subscription is brought to everyone’s attention.

(iii) Commercial distribution

Our own state and territory commercial distribution agents all have lists of bookshops, newsagents and libraries that they can target, and they all know the commercial procedure to follow. There’s a pretty labour-intensive job, but it repays the effort once we’ve sorted out where sales result.

As a result of the effort of these comrades *Seeing Red* already has steady sales in some “usual suspect” inner-city bookshops in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Hobart and Adelaide. A lot, however, remains to be done, and it needs others to volunteer.

Opportunity: Why not volunteer to help out the commercial distribution agent in your town or city? Visiting five or six bookshops or newsagents every three months isn’t a great burden, and helps get the magazine out to people who wouldn’t know about it otherwise.

Content and feedback

Nearly every Socialist Alliance member I know has a lot to say about a lot of things—but the majority are pretty shy of putting their thoughts down in writing. Yet those thoughts, even if still unformed and contradictory, will very often be the raw material of interesting and even challenging copy for the magazine, whether they took the form of a letter, a quizzical note for our Behind the Headlines section or a longer article or polemic with a previous contribution.

In addition, of us all know others whom we respect for their expertise, experience or understanding of particular issues. We wish more people knew about their work.

Seeing Red strongly needs Socialist Alliance members to bring their knowledge, interest and passion to bear on the content of the magazine. You think a certain article isn’t worth the paper it’s written on? Say so (and be prepared to learn from the ensuing debate!). You’ve come across some hilarious or horrible incident that carries a message about the world we live in? Let us know, even if only as a source. You’ve read a piece that you think casts light on a particular theme, or suggests an author we should approach? Let us know immediately at seeingred@socialist-alliance.org!

To help increase the engagement of Socialist Alliance (and other) comrades with *Seeing Red* the Editorial Board is presently discussing a division of labour that would have particular board members (and contributing editors) take responsibility for pursuing issues, debates and copy in specific areas. In this way we are looking to spread the work of constructing more extensive and developed networks in all the areas that could potentially interest the *Seeing Red* readership.

We also imagine these networks would partially overlap with already existing Socialist Alliance campaign committees and caucuses, establishing a more direct link between the work of comrades and the magazine. This will hopefully lead to copy and coverage that is more accurately targeted to the needs and interests of the *Seeing Red* readership.

Production and publicity

Many comrades have other skills, in graphics and cartooning, in web-page design, and even in the ins and outs of magazine production. *Seeing Red* needs you to volunteer them! In particular, the July meeting of the Editorial Board decided to ask for volunteers for the following jobs.

- Coordinating the *Seeing Red* web page
- Seeking out potential advertisers (e.g. left book publishers)
- Chasing up artwork and graphics
- Sub-editing

Can you help? Don't hide your light under a bushel but contact us at seeingred@socialist-alliance and help *Seeing Red* help Socialist Alliance.

Appendix A

Seeing Red financial statement (2004-2005 financial year)

Profit and Loss (accrual basis)

	Jul '04 - Jun '05	Jul '03 - Jun '04	\$ Change	% Change
<i>Seeing Red</i> Income				
Other sales	16,620.75	7,680.30	8,940.45	116.4%
Subscriptions	2,394.00	2,168.00	226.00	10.4%
Total <i>Seeing Red</i> Income	19,014.75	9,848.30	9,166.45	93.1%
Total Income	19,014.75	9,848.30	9,166.45	93.1%
<i>Seeing Red</i> Expenses	12,984.50	6,926.80	6,057.70	87.5%
Total Expenses	12,984.50	6,926.80	6,057.70	87.5%
Net Income	6,030.25	2,921.50	3,108.75	106.4%

Profit and Loss (cash basis)

	Jul '04 - Jun '05	Jul '03 - Jun '04	\$ Change	% Change
<i>Seeing Red</i> Income				
Other sales	5,720.70	1,963.80	3,756.90	191.3%
Subscriptions	2,424.00	2,138.00	286.00	13.4%
Total <i>Seeing Red</i> Income	8,144.70	4,101.80	4,042.90	98.6%
Total Income	8,144.70	4,101.80	4,042.90	98.6%
<i>Seeing Red</i> Expenses	13,006.50	6,904.80	6,101.70	88.4%
Total Expense	13,006.50	6,904.80	6,101.70	88.4%
Net Income	-4,861.80	-2,803.00	-2,058.80	-73.5%

Appendix B

		Issue No 3 Print run:		2500
State	Branches	Bundle	Sales	% sold
SA	Adelaide	30	15	50%
VIC	Ballarat	10	1	10%
VIC	Bendigo	10	3	30.0%
NSW	Blue Mountains	10	Unknown	
QLD	Brisbane Central	120	61	50.8%
ACT	Canberra	100	64	64%
NSW	Canterbury-Bankstown	50	Unknown	
NT	Darwin	25	9	35%
VIC	Geelong	30	Unknown	
QLD	Gold Coast	20	Unknown	
TAS	Hobart	40	Unknown	
NSW	Illawarra	80	13	16.25%
VIC	Melbourne District	200	150	75%
NSW	Newcastle	50	6	12.00%
NSW	Northern Rivers	30	3	10.00%
WA	Perth	100	40	40.00%
NSW	Sydney Central	250	101	40.40%
NSW	Sydney West	50	Unknown	
	Total	1305	466	36%

Appendix C

State	Place	Person	Phone
ACT	Canberra	Jude Morton	0413 387 915
NSW	Illawarra	Belinda Selke	0425 299 217
NSW	Northern Rivers	Tom Flanagan	0427 334 595
NSW	Sydney	T.B.A	
NT	Darwin	Robyn Waite	0410 781 310
QLD	Brisbane	Michael McDonald	0405 607 514
QLD	Gold Coast	Pablo Alvaro	0414 996 959
SA	Adelaide	John Nebauer, David Nicks	0438 123 339
TAS	Hobart	Linda Seaborn	0423 764 896
TAS	Launceston	Mandy Bowden	0400 147 116
	Ballarat	T.B.A.	
VIC	Bendigo	Claudine Holt	03 5430 5876
VIC	Geelong	T.B.A	
VIC	Melbourne	Robert Hodder	03 9376 1153
WA	Perth	T.B.A	

Perspective at the SA national conference

By Louise Walker (Melbourne Central branch)

At the 2005 National Conference of the Socialist Alliance, I presented an edited version of this perspective on behalf of the three non-affiliated National Convenors, Raul Bassi, Lalitha Chelliah and myself. We were all active participants in the Non-Aligned Caucus (NAC). I submit this speech in *Alliance Voices* so that comrades who weren't at the Conference get a sense of our position first-hand – there have been a number of attempts by others to represent and misrepresent our position to a wider socialist audience.

It is, of course, common knowledge, that some of the positions we put forward in pre-Conference and at Conference were not adopted by the Conference. Contrary to claims made immediately after the event, we were not in the slightest surprised by this, as we knew in advance that the three of us had no hope of seriously challenging the political influence within the Alliance of an organisation the size of the DSP. That is, we went into the 2005 National Conference putting forward our perspective and the proposals that flow from it because we were genuinely for it, and knew it was important that we stand up for it.

However what is perhaps less well-known is that a number of our positions were accepted, including many of the changes we argued for in relation to the original proposals put forward by the SA-GLW Editorial Board. The final make-up of the SA-GLW Board adopted by the Conference bore considerable resemblance to our practical suggestions, and not the original proposals of the SA-GLW Editorial Board. Unfortunately the crucial debate about how Green Left Weekly would need to transform for it to truly reflect the politics of the Alliance membership as a whole rather than the politics of the DSP was not discussed, and was subsumed by the question of whether or not the entire SA-GLW trial had failed. The importance of achieving a genuine transformation of content in GLW remains a matter about which I'm seriously concerned, one which I hope, even at this late stage, is thoroughly discussed and clearly understood before any decision is made for GLW to become the paper of the Alliance.

13 August, 2005

We are in a period where the socialist movement must regroup first before it can expect to directly influence the course of the class struggle. Adopting any other reading of the situation would be fantasy and would doom us to continued political marginalization.

The space to the left of Labor is broad, and is for a campaigning, socialist renewal party, not an electorally focussed formation nor a hard-left super-activist formation.

The role that non-affiliated members have played reflects this. Our engagement in SA would not have occurred for any of the affiliates individually, and is not a result of an upsurge in the class struggle or affiliate work in particular campaigns.

Generally, non-affiliated members are:

- For socialist unity and against factionalism;
- Definitively finished with the Labor Party, positive about the growth of the Greens and not attracted to existing revolutionary left/Leninist-style organising;

- For affiliate retention of identity, voice and vote, and growth, but within a united party framework;
- For socialist renewal, including finding new ways forward from previous failed ways of organizing;
- We are an aging demographic of mostly long-time socialists and left activists, highly conscious of the small window of opportunity that the Alliance offers to rebuild the socialist movement. We are intolerant of affiliates that refuse to grasp this crossroads period and who view the Alliance as simply a tactical or mid-term initiative for advancing their tendency ambitions.

The 50% DSP delegate weight at this conference, and the working DSP majority in most branches, demonstrates the political problem of applying the mantras 'one person, one vote' and 'those who work, lead' in SA at the moment. Currently it leads to single tendency domination, not a broad-based, inclusive and diverse multi-tendency party. The Scottish Socialist Party success has had several dimensions, but the critical missing dimension in Australia is the lack of support from most of the socialist left for such an SSP-style formation.

Skirting around this political gulf with vague claims that 'there is no model' and 'we're trying lots of things in the branches' doesn't stack up.

We fully acknowledge that DSP comrades are doing the bulk of SA work. We know SA depends upon it. We have consistently said that we don't think that it is a good thing that the practical commitment to SA is so one-sided and unbalanced. *Institutionalising* this imbalance would be a major political mistake.

For us, this is where the most obvious contradiction lies: DSP comrades are doing the bulk of SA work, and are understandably complaining that it is falling on their shoulders. So why not support our perspective for broadening and expanding the leadership of the Alliance to get us away from this? If some DSP comrades really do want a highly-activist centralized party, organised principally around Leninist methods, well, then, let's begin by openly acknowledging that. That is not what SA should be, and we know SA cannot be both.

As we see it,

1. Existing affiliates are not for the largely DSP-set direction for SA;
2. A large slice of the diverse non-affiliated membership are increasingly marginalized from the culture and direction of SA;
3. Most of the organized socialist left is still outside the Alliance;
4. Most existing long-time socialists and left activists have stayed out of the Alliance or have left in the first couple of years. They vastly outnumber the existing SA membership.

Unless we change this scene, we will never achieve socialist unity and renewal.

That means socialist unity and regroupment is of at least equal political importance, and indispensable to, all of our efforts to publicly campaign around progressive causes. We must be involved in these campaigns, but if we don't regroup the scattered and divided socialist movement as an equal priority we will not have any capacity to break out of our marginal political existence. It is vital to grasp this point. Rebuilding the socialist movement is what the Socialist Alliance has to offer that is historically so special for the left and the class struggle.

The DSP course for the Socialist Alliance will narrow the potential political base for what Socialist Alliance is, and who it will appeal to. Many of us have noted that narrowing already.

The NAC course provides a potential bridge to the wider socialist groups and individuals not yet convinced of the important possibility SA provides for socialist regroupment.

In line with this core priority for socialist regroupment, we need to maintain the 50% majority of non-affiliated members on SA's leadership bodies. Non-affiliated leaders currently form a central leadership wing of the Alliance, and should be given that structural space with clear boundaries, so that we can self-organise, network and find support among each other to shape our own national leadership teams. We should elect our own representatives to the national leadership. This would deepen the partnership with, and provide a practical counter-weight to, the overwhelming influence of Leninist affiliates and tendencies in SA. All affiliates should retain effective voice and say, proportional to one another in the Alliance, including at appropriate leadership levels.

This would be another transitional step toward a multi-tendency socialist party.

The argument that this would entrench factionalism is totally false. Factions are not the same as factionalism. What is a multi-tendency party if it doesn't accept and embrace the reality of a variety of coalesced political views?

If we don't structure our organisation to embrace factional diversity, and instead we adopt a homogenized, centralized structure and methods of organising, it will spell an end, sooner or later, to the embryonic socialist unity prospects that the Socialist Alliance offers.

We need an organisational structure that allows multiple tendencies - factions if you will - to co-exist within a united framework. If political agreement over time leads to resolving some political differences that is good, but it must be allowed to occur naturally. Pushing political difference to the margins doesn't end factionalism - it promotes factionalism and disengagement. It doesn't create unity - it promotes disunity.

I urge all comrades to support our proposals, so that SA can continue to move towards becoming the broad, diverse socialist party, able to reach out to socialist groups and individuals outside the project, to strengthen our capacity to fight the bosses' attacks.

A very brief comment on Louise Walker's letter

By Alex Miller (Sydney Central branch & SA-GLW Editorial Liaison Board)

Speaking of the debate between the (then) non-aligned national convenors and the GLW-SA editorial liaison board at the Socialist Alliance national conference in June this year, Louise Walker writes: "a number of our positions were accepted, including many of the changes we argued for in relation to the original proposals put forward by the SA-GLW Editorial Board. The final make-up of the SA-GLW Board adopted by the Conference bore considerable resemblance to our practical suggestions, and not the original proposals of the SA-GLW Editorial Board".

The final motion on the membership of the GLW-SA board put forward by Louise (with Raul Bassi and Lalitha Chelliah) argued for "the inclusion of a minimum of one dedicated position representing the interests of small affiliates, with a possibility of further positions being held by non-DSP affiliates, and an overall majority of Board positions allocated to non-DSP representatives, elected from the floor of National Conference".

Conference rejected this and accepted a motion put forward by the GLW-SA board, which incorporating an amendment I proposed myself, read: "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".

The main outstanding difference between Louise's motion and the GLW-SA board motion was that the latter did not require there to be an overall majority of non-DSP representatives on the board. However, as a matter of fact, the board of 11 that was actually elected did contain such a majority. So overall, the end result was (I hope) acceptable both to Louise, Raul and Lalitha, and also to the GLW-SA board. Although the debate in the lead-up to conference about the membership of the board was at times heated and acrimonious, it did (I think) end up on a constructive note, with a board that all sides could be happy with.

Louise also writes in her letter: "The importance of achieving a genuine transformation of content in GLW remains a matter about which I'm seriously concerned, one which I hope, even at this late stage, is thoroughly discussed and clearly understood before any decision is made for GLW to become the paper of the Alliance". I agree with Louise about the importance of this issue, and hope that all sides in the debate will now work constructively with the GLW-SA board in taking the Green Left Weekly – Socialist Alliance partnership forward.

August 17th 2005

Procedural issues from the conference

By Carl Kenner (Adelaide branch)

I have a number of concerns about how the conference was run, and how future conferences should be run...

Firstly, the issue of disabilities. Quite a few disabled people attempted to move motions at this conference. They are required to get up and speak to their motion like everyone else. However they clearly had a great deal of difficulty doing this, and I think this affected how well the motions were received.

Some disabled or otherwise incapacitated people who had friends had already organised someone to speak on their behalf, while others attempted it themselves and fared badly.

I think there either needs to be a less confrontational format in which disabled people can present their resolutions, or there needs to be some system where people are organised to present resolutions on behalf of disabled people (either by explaining and advocating them, or reading from something the person has prepared). And if disabled people are attempting to put forward their resolution and become flustered and unable to do so, there should be someone available to jump in and take over.

Also there needs to be more awareness of the difficulties disabled people face in presenting resolutions, and that this does not in any way indicate that the resolutions are not thoroughly researched or that they do not have convincing arguments in favour of them. The presenter's confidence should not be the convincing factor.

Secondly, the issue of resolutions not actually being presented to the conference. This is really disgraceful, and I think that if resolutions are not going to be allowed to be presented and voted upon, then the mover should be notified before they spend hundreds of dollars to attend the conference, or they should receive their money back afterwards. This still wouldn't compensate for all the effort they have to put into them though. The conference's behaviour in this regard was absolutely disgusting and shameful, and makes me truly sick.

Thirdly, the issue of delegates not actually attending votes. There is an expectation that people's elected delegates will actually attend sessions and vote. They should not be off getting coffee, or having a chat, or whatever while votes are underway. If we have to organise people to go off to fetch coffee or food for delegates then we should.

And fourthly, it wouldn't kill people to do some actual research on the issues raised in Alliance Voices, rather than relying on ignorance and bigotry.

National executive election and democracy in SA

By Greg McFarlane (Sydney Northside branch)

The publication in the last Alliance Voices of the preferences for all votes in the national executive election allows an analysis to be done of voting patterns. Without any prior knowledge of the candidates or voters, it is possible to analyse the votes and detect patterns in voting behaviour. One of the most striking findings of this analysis is the observation of strict voting blocks. Only 10% of voters voted "independently", that is they did not vote according to a pre-arranged ticket. This indicates a very low presence of members who are not "in with" one group or another.

The 105 votes cast were divided into the following five groups.

a) 61 votes were for the DSP ticket. Of these 51 were identical up to the 12th preference. The other 10 showed some degree of independence, if only by mixing up the 12 preferred candidates into a different order. The order of preference was 6 DSP members and then 6 candidates who were not members of any affiliate (the "DSP-preferred independents"). These 61 votes elected the 6 DSP members and 4 of the 6 DSP-preferred independents, for a total of 10 out of the 15 candidates.

b) 13 votes were for block of 5 non-aligned independents who elected 2 candidates. These votes were identical up to the 4th or 5th preference, although the ordering was different.

c) 12 voted for the ISO ticket. These votes were identical up to the 8th preference, with a couple of minor variations. The order of preference was 2 ISO members, 5 independent block and one FSP. The 2 ISO members were elected.

d) 8 voted for the FSP ticket. These votes were identical up to the 3rd preference. The preferences went 1 FSP member, 2 ISO members and then a strong vote for the independents for the next several preferences. The 1 FSP member was elected.

e) 11 voted "independently". Although each of these votes were unique and suggest that the voter took some care in considering their preferences, almost all of them voted for at least 2 DSP members or DSP-preferred independents in the first three preferences.

From this analysis the candidates can be divided into the following groups:

6 DSP members

6 DSP-preferred independents

5 Independent block

2 ISO members

2 "Real" independents

1 FSP member

22 Total

This analysis gives cause for concern that free and open democracy may not be well in Socialist Alliance. Rather than responding to a medium where new ideas flow freely and divergence and dissent is accepted and encouraged, it appears that almost all voters at the annual conference followed strictly set-down guidelines directing how their vote should be cast. As somewhat of an outsider, the most worrying aspect for me is that it appears that the DSP directed their voters how to vote not just for the 6 DSP candidates but for the next 6 of their preferences as well. Nearly all DSP voters expressed preferences after the 12th and only 2 of these votes were the same, suggesting that DSP voters also took some care in considering those preferences that were not pre-selected for them. This indicates that the DSP voters actually did want to express their preferences.

So the question remains, if the DSP really wants to foster a broadly based Socialist Alliance, why did they not let their voters decide independently who to give their preferences to? And why did the 5 independents think it necessary to form a block where they presumably all voted for each other? Is this the sort of democracy that will see Socialist Alliance into the future? Is this the sort of democracy that we see as a model for a future socialist Australia?

Democracy and SA elections

By Lisa Macdonald (Sydney West branch & National Executive member)

In his comments on the Socialist Alliance national executive election at the 2005 conference, Greg McFarlane expresses concern about only 10% of delegates voting "independently". I cannot speak for the other affiliates in SA, or for non-affiliated delegates (those organised in the Non-Aligned Caucus or the others), but, having consulted with Greg, I want to reply briefly to explain how the members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective approached that election.

As a multi-tendency socialist party, the SA includes organised tendencies as affiliates, including the DSP. The DSP is the only affiliate to have consistently argued for and actively encouraged (mainly by example) all affiliates to make the Socialist Alliance the party they build. The DSP's aim in that regard was to strengthen the Alliance as a whole such that the members of affiliates would increasingly become a minority within the SA membership as a whole. Unfortunately, this has not proceeded far, and the relative weight of DSP members in SA remains pretty big.

The DSP is very conscious of that weight and, as a tendency in the SA, has been very conscious of always and openly communicating our views on how the Alliance can be developed, the (potential) role of the affiliates in that process, and the importance of non-affiliated members taking real leadership in the SA. These perspectives were spelt out clearly in various contributions to the 2005 pre-conference discussion in *Alliance Voices*, and were the basis of our approach to the decisions to be made at the 2005 national conference.

As a tendency working to build SA, DSP members spend considerable time discussing how to strengthen the Alliance - its membership, level of breadth of activity, democratic functioning, public profile, etc - and also doing the work on the ground to make that happen, alongside all those non-DSP members in SA who also want to build the Alliance.

Inevitably, in the process of discussing and carrying out this work, DSP members form opinions about what should be done in and by the Alliance to strengthen it. Because we are members of a political tendency we often (though by no means always!) arrive at common positions about the best way forward for SA, which we put to SA as proposals, for further discussion, amendment and adoption or rejection by the SA membership as a whole. The important thing is - and this is our overall approach to SA - we have always been open about our opinions, open to others' proposals and prepared to make compromises, and our members have always carried out the democratically arrived at decisions of SA, including those we thought were a mistake.

In the lead-up to the 2005 national conference, DSP members of course discussed with our views on the various policy and campaign proposals being put to the conference, and the sort of leadership bodies we thought would best advance the Socialist Alliance in the current political context. Those discussions also involved a lot of non-DSP SA members, those who responded to our public request to discuss the issues.

The proposal for the sort of national executive that the DSP and some non-affiliated members thought would be most effective for SA was publicised to the SA membership via *Alliance Voices* ("A proposal for SA's national leadership structure", Vol 5, No 5), and then amended ("Amendments to our proposals for SA's national leadership structure", Vol 5, No 7) based on feedback we received on the original proposal from non-affiliated members and members of other affiliates.

The whole process of pre-conference discussion led to agreement amongst DSP members, and some non-affiliated members, about what sort of NE would be best for SA. We argued for an NE that would reflect the "on the ground" work of SA, that guaranteed minority representation (by being elected by proportional representation) and effective representation from all states and territories, and with a 40% limit on members elected at conference from any one affiliate. Others in SA formed a different opinion, and argued for that.

This debate about perspectives for SA and what sort of national executive to elect was not just had at the national conference; it was also debated in branch meetings in the lead-up to the conference, and was a factor in the broader membership's decisions about who to elect as their delegates to the conference.

What we argued for in the lead-up to and during the conference is also what we voted for in the NE election. In other words, DSP members, along with some non-DSP delegates, voted, not according to "strict instructions", but according to who they wanted elected to the NE.

Any implication that the DSP "did they not let their voters decide independently who to give their preferences to" makes no sense when you think about the fact that the NE vote was conducted by secret ballot, not a show of hands, so DSP members, just like all delegates, were quite able to vote for whomever they wanted on the NE. Their votes reflected their opinions, as all democratic votes should.

This means that in order to get a different (more "independent") voting "pattern", the DSP would have had to instruct some of our members to vote for candidates they did not support being on the NE - something that would have been utterly undemocratic and which, in any case, no DSP delegate would not have accepted!

The main point is that, the fact that "only 10% of delegates did not vote according to a block" indicated something that was clear to all delegates at the conference - that the composition of the NE was going to reflect different perspectives on the way forward for the SA. The delegates - affiliated and non-affiliated - knew that, in deciding who to vote for, it would be politically irresponsible to simply construct a "random" list of individuals, and that which candidates to vote for needed to be decided, at least in part, on the basis of which of the general perspectives for building SA they stood for.

Approaching the election of leadership bodies in this political way is a strength for SA, not a weakness.

National trade union fightback campaign

The Socialist Alliance national executive meeting on July 17, 2005, agreed to proposals from SA's national Trade Union Committee to:

1. get more SA unionists to become delegates
2. attend and support the official union campaign activities such as the leafleting of the footy matches
3. support union solidarity group/defend the unions groups which are set up
4. build support for picket lines and maybe initiating picket line support networks in cities where it's not realistic to set up a union solidarity group which has regular meetings
5. involve all SA members in the campaign and not just SA union members.

6. SA will need a new leaflet.
7. support the continuation of the ACTU's advertising campaign
8. argue for mass all-union delegates' meetings in all states before the next national day of action.
9. urgently set a date for a national day of action
10. start raising idea of some sort of industrial campaign to be launched from the national day of action to penalize the employers who are pushing for the legislation.
11. argue for unions to take solidarity action with any union or individual targeted under the legislation.
12. argue that the community/union alliance is most effective when it is based on united action
13. encourage our NTEU comrades to build support for the student protests on 10 August
14. try to ensure a union presence at the any of the social movement protests coming up such as anti-war, refugee, student etc.
15. defer Simon Millar's proposal for another Fightback Conference before the end of the year to the next meeting in a month's time.
16. appeal for volunteers to work on the Union Fightback Website & that we investigate the possibility of having one person in each city having the password to upload information on the website
17. set up the website in such a way that people can post comments in response to articles on the website - similar to how the Indymedia website works
18. start the Union Fightback newsletter as soon as possible & that we get as many people as possible to send short snappy news items about what is happening in their union or state. We would set it up so that people can subscribe to it by email. We need to appeal for volunteers to help out with the national newsletter.
19. build up the Union Fightback network by actively seeking to link individuals, representatives in supportive unions, union solidarity/defend the unions groups and any unionists who would find it useful to be part of the network to find out what is happening in the campaign in other states and other unions. We need to get one or several contact points for the network in each state.

In addition, the National Executive decided to:

20. produce a new national SA leaflet on the industrial relations laws.
21. Seek people in cities/states to be contact points for the Fightback network and to do the newsletter and website.
22. Publicise around "named and shamed" pickets in various states.
23. Call on our members when they hear of someone being victimised to call on their own union leaders to act.

At its meeting on August 21, 2005, following discussion about the latest developments in the trade union campaign, the National Executive decided that:

1. SA unionists describe the 25 October national day of action as a national strike (the ACTU is not describing it this way) and encourage unions to take strike action on the day so that we have the maximum turn-out rather than unions just sending delegations to the rallies.

2. SA unionists consider moving motions in our respective unions that reaffirm a union position calling for the abolition of AWAs and calling on all political parties to commit themselves to abolishing AWAs. This is important because Kim Beazley announced that a future ALP government would keep AWAs as long as they don't have the capacity "to undermine collective awards".

3. With the ALP and other parliamentary parties wanting political support from the trade movement without guaranteeing to support key elements of the union campaign, SA should argue within the trade union movement that no party will get blank cheque support from unions without a commitment to support a list of basic union demands eg abolition of AWAs and promise to support the repeal of Howard's anti-union laws.

Two key features of the Howard Government's fourth term agenda are the Industrial Relations proposals and the Welfare to Work plans. These two attacks are linked in that the welfare proposals are about creating a pool of low paid workers who must accept any jobs in offer. In developing a list of concrete basic union demands, Socialist Alliance will include specific demands about welfare rights.

SA retains its `political party' status

By Lisa Macdonald (National coordinator)

Most members of the Socialist Alliance will know that the Australian Electoral Commission regularly reviews the Alliance's status as a legally registered political party. Our status as a registered party allows the name Socialist Alliance to appear on all ballot papers in federal elections, and also entitles us to claim electoral funding if we receive sufficient votes in federal elections.

However, maintaining registered party status is a very laborious process, involving jumping through many bureaucratic hoops. SA's national and branch accounts can be audited by the AEC every year, we must submit all sorts of paperwork to the AEC regarding branches, candidates, etc before and after every election, and every few years we must prove that we have at least 500 current financial members who are correctly enrolled to vote and are not a member

of any other registered party (political parties that have one or more members of parliament are not required to submit such membership lists for review). We must provide a list of these members to the AEC, which then contacts a random sample of the members and asks them to confirm their financial membership of SA.

Over the last couple of months the SA has been being reviewed. On August 18, the AEC confirmed that we passed the review.

So, on behalf of the National Executive, thank you to all the comrades in each state and territory who put a lot of work into getting our membership records into shape for the review, and ensuring we succeeded (the AEC officer also thanked us for the prompt and polite responses of all the SA members they rang!)

Congratulations comrades.

No Second-Rate Citizenship! Fight Homophobia – Same-sex marriage rights for ALL!

The following Socialist Alliance statement was distributed by members who helped organise and participated in the National Day of Action for relationship equality on August 13, 2005.

August 13, 2005, is the one-year anniversary of the ban on same-sex marriage - the federal law that institutionalises second-rate citizenship for same-sex couples.

Uganda recently joined Australia in outlawing same-sex marriage. Uganda also has laws jailing gays and lesbians for up to seven years.

While homophobic nations gravitate to Australia's example - more enlightened countries grant full marriage rights.

Canada is the fourth country to introduce same-sex marriage laws, following Spain, The Netherlands in 2001 and Belgium in 2003. Denmark has marriage rights in all but name - "registered partnerships" rather than "marriage" for same-sex unions. In 1989, same-sex couples were able to "marry" with the same rights as heterosexual couples. Such equality, in all but name, was followed by Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland.

The passing of the same-sex marriage ban in 2004 gave fuel to homophobic prejudice. At the August 4-6 National Marriage Forum in Canberra, which John Howard and Nicola Roxan attended, Christian right leaders argued that "homosexuals are the moral terrorists of the 21st century".

The passage of the homophobic ban increases the risk of physical attacks and mental anguish for the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community.

A recent Australian Institute survey showed that 35% of Australians think homosexuality is immoral. Same-sex attracted youth are up to six times more likely to kill themselves than heterosexual youth and a NSW report "*You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe*" shows incidences of homophobic violence have not changed over the last 10 years. 85% of lesbians and gay men have experienced harassment or violence during their lifetime with 1 in 4 reporting being physically attacked at some time in their life.

Defeating homophobia is really a matter of life and death. Through banning same-sex marriage the major parties have fuelled bigotry and violence – internal and external. They have set liberation back years.

We want the right to same-sex marriage!

A Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby survey showed that 98% of the LGBTI community support legal recognition of same-sex marriage, with 45% saying they wanted to be able to get married.

We need a grassroots campaign that beats back Liberal and Labor's moralizing, along with their allies - the Christian right. With the control of the Senate firmly in the Liberals' hands we can only rely on grassroots action.

2004 saw a broader "moral" crusade by both Liberal and Labor to instil "normal" family (read: heterosexual) values. It's a "wedge politics" strategy: accuse the minority groups of undermining the "normal" way of life and no-one will protest the government's lying, cheating record. Divide the straights from the queers, the refugees from the free, and we'll miss the real cause of the problem - the government and their corporate backers.

Workers are next on the chopping block. Howard's attempt to drive down wages and get rid of unfair dismissal laws will disproportionately affect the LGBTI community. It's already bad in the workplace: 59% of people surveyed in "*The pink ceiling is too low: Workplace experiences of lesbians, gay men and transgender people*" experienced harassment or prejudicial treatment. Howard's plan is to smash unions, the organisations that will stand up against homophobic bosses and attitudes in the workplace.

It's been 1981 since the LGBTI community held a national day of action in Australia. This national day of action is historic. The level of unity across the country is a huge step forward for the movement against homophobia. We support the call by Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby convenor Peter Dillon for "a national united campaign".

Socialist Alliance is fighting Howard's attacks on workers and queers. We are fighting for an end to the occupation of Iraq and to free the refugees. Join us – be part of making history!

Strengthening trans-Tasman cooperation: Letter to Socialist Worker-New Zealand

Following is correspondence between Socialist Worker-New Zealand and the Socialist Alliance in July and August, 2005:

“Dear comrades,

Thanks for your letter of a few weeks ago indicating that you would like to establish fraternal relations with Socialist Alliance.

The SA national executive meeting on July 17 discussed your letter and would like to make a few suggestions for how we might strengthen the working relationship between our organisations - for your consideration.

1. It could be mutually very useful to include an article written by your organisation about some aspect of NZ politics in each issue of Seeing Red, the quarterly magazine initiated by the Socialist Alliance some 18 months ago. I think Grant has copies of some recent issues of the magazine, but you can also visit the web site we've just established at www.seeing-red.org to get more idea of the content of the magazine.

2. Maybe you would like to take a small bundle of Seeing Red to distribute to SW-NZ members and anyone else who is interested?

3. We are very impressed with the workers' charter project you have initiated and want to publicise that more amongst the Australian left. We therefore want to put the draft charter and related information on the Socialist Alliance web site (www.socialist-alliance.org), with the appropriate links, and will also publish it in Alliance Voices, our national members' discussion bulletin.

4. We are keen to have a Socialist Alliance representative at the workers' charter conference in NZ in October, if that is feasible, and will stay in touch with you about possibilities. We appreciated Grant's attendance at our 2005 national conference last month, and would of course welcome your comrades' attendance at future national gatherings of the Alliance.

The SA national executive is very open to any other suggestions you might have for closer collaboration, and looks forward to staying in touch about political developments across the Tasman.

Comradely regards,

Lisa Macdonald

on behalf of the National Executive

* * *

Kia ora Lisa (copy to SW-NZ central committee & Vaughan & Joe)

At a telelink tonight [August 21], Socialist Worker-New Zealand's central committee discussed our relationship with Socialist Alliance in Australia.

We welcome all the practical networking suggestions from SA in response to SW-NZ's stated desire for closer fraternal relations.

In response to your four points:

(1) Dave Colyer, a SW-NZ central committee member, will work (hopefully with another comrade) on regular articles about NZ politics for Seeing Red magazine.

For the remaining three points, I will take off my SW hat & pull on my Workers Charter one.

(2) The Workers Charter conference would be an excellent venue for selling NZ subscriptions to Seeing Red. It would be good if a SA representative to the conference brought across a bundle for sale.

(3) The Workers Charter movement would welcome the SA website carrying stuff on our Charter. Below is a "call to Australian leftists & unionists" that I sent out a couple of days ago on behalf of the Charter Steering Committee.

(4) The Steering Committee welcomes an official SA delegate to our 22 October conference. The committee charged me with asking you if Socialist Alliance's delegate could be Craig Johnston. We felt that Craig would intersect with the fightback mood that's starting to grow here in New Zealand.

Kia kaha,

Grant Morgan

SW-NZ secretary

gcm@actrix.gen.nz

Call to Australian leftists & unionists: WILL YOU ENDORSE?

Kia ora comrade,

Below is a report from New Zealand on the Workers Charter, an emerging broad movement of leftists & unionists setting out to build a mass alternative to corporate power.

We're asking for people to personally endorse the Workers Charter (printed below). It would be excellent to get endorsements from your side of the Tasman, since our rulers are intent on setting up a Single Market embracing Australia & New Zealand, which will force workers in both countries to unite our struggles.

If you would like to endorse, simply reply to this email, and say where you're from & how you would like to be described. Every endorsement is important to us.

And could you please forward this email to others around Australia who you think would be supportive, and urge them to endorse. Thank you.

Kia kaha,
Grant Morgan
for Workers Charter Steering Committee, Auckland, New Zealand

Report on Workers Charter from the Steering Committee

On 18 August, a draft Workers Charter (see below) was finalised by the Steering Committee. It reflects a good spirit of co-operation among different leftists & unionists. Over the next year there will be mass discussion of the draft Charter, which is bound to change it considerably. If you want to suggest changes to the draft, please send them by return email.

The Charter's advocacy of workers' human dignity and democratic rights will strike home to workers sick of being treated as "invisible" objects of exploitation, suffering low pay and lack of rights.

This finalised draft is a great starting point. It gives us the political glue to begin the process of sticking together a mass alternative to corporate power.

WHERE TO NOW?

Okay, we've now got a draft Charter. So what exactly do we do with it? Here are some immediate objectives:

1. Endorsers are needed

To show that our project is broad-based, we need heaps of people to personally endorse the draft Charter. (This doesn't mean you endorse every single word, since you may want to see changes to the draft, but does mean you endorse the Charter in general outline.)

If you support the Charter, please send your endorsement by return email. Add your occupation and/or your community/political role(s). (It will be stressed that you endorse as an individual, not on behalf of anybody else.)

Also, could you forward this email to your own networks, prefaced by your personal recommendation that your friends endorse the Charter.

2. Spreading the news

As many endorsements as possible will go into a Workers Charter leaflet, which will ask for feedback on the draft.

The first edition of the leaflet will be produced within a few days, and emailed out so you can flick it on and print out your own. At your request, bundles will be posted so you can leaflet local workers. A Workers Charter poster will also be produced, suitable for lunch rooms, notice boards, public places, etc. It will be emailed to you. A website will be set up that includes a feedback forum on the draft Charter.

It would be good to produce Workers Charter billboards to go on fences at busy intersections. As shown by RAM's campaign, billboards that speak directly to workers can be popular and influential. To make happen, billboards need two things: funding and volunteers. If you can donate money or time or both to a billboard campaign, please advise by return email.

3. Building our conference

Saturday 22 October (on Labour weekend) is the date of our Workers Charter conference. It will be in Auckland, with the venue to be finalised. This will be a fantastic opportunity to debate the draft Charter, network with a range of leftists and organise a broad movement for workers' rights.

Everyone who wants to work constructively with other Charter supporters is welcome. We want hundreds along from all over the country.

A big turnout will energise our Charter movement, grab media attention and raise workers' confidence that a mass alternative to corporate power is possible.

If you want to attend the conference, please advise by return email. If you live outside Auckland and require a billet, let me know.

Got other suggestions? Please send them for the Steering Committee.

In solidarity,
Grant Morgan

Draft Workers Charter

Every worker is a human being who deserves the right to dignity.

For that right to be at the heart of our society, workers need economic justice and democratic control over our future.

But what motivates society today is the selfish right of a privileged few to gather wealth from the productive majority.

Workers are mere commodities, exploited and discarded like any other. Our status in society is worsened by market competition, free trade and commercialisation of public assets.

The wealth of New Zealanders on the Rich List skyrockets. Meanwhile the living standards of the majority fall, and one in three children grow up in poverty here in Aotearoa.

Wars of conquest to control global resources, like the US colonisation of Iraq, expand corporate wealth and power at the cost of mass bloodshed and suffering.

Profit-driven exploitation of the environment is fueling global warming, an oil crisis and other threats to life on our planet.

The end result is massive growth in social inequality and environmental destruction. Our humanity and our environment have been sacrificed to the god of profit. Our ability to resist is undermined by laws that ban most strikes.

As a positive alternative, the Workers Charter promotes these core democratic rights:

- 1. The right to a job that pays a living wage and gives us time with our families and communities.*
- 2. The right to pay equity for women, youth and casual workers.*
- 3. The right to free public healthcare and education, and to liveable superannuation and welfare.*
- 4. The right to decent housing without crippling mortgages and rents.*
- 5. The right to public control of assets vital to community well-being.*
- 6. The right to protect our environment from corporate greed.*
- 7. The right to express our personal identity free from discrimination.*
- 8. The right to strike in defence of our interests.*
- 9. The right to organise for the transfer of wealth and power from the haves to the have-nots.*
- 10. The right to unite with workers in other lands against corporate globalisation and war.*

These rights can only be secured by workers organising to extend democracy into every sphere of the economy and the state. This will involve the complete transformation of our society to serve the needs of the majority rather than the greed of the minority.

The privileged few will resist fiercely. They will use their economic and political power to try to deny workers our rights.

A mass mobilisation around the Workers Charter can give us the strength to win the battle for democracy and reclaim our human dignity.

Report on Workers Charter founding meeting

“For your information, below is a fairly detailed report on the Workers Charter founding meeting - Grant Morgan”.

A Workers Charter movement was founded in Auckland on 2 July by 50 activists, with 20 more sending their support. Coming from an array of left groups, workers' unions and social movements, they were united in their desire to give workers a political voice. Here is a report of these historic proceedings:

'Political agendas'

Mike Treen, a prominent union and social activist in Auckland, chaired the meeting. "The voice of working people isn't reflected in the agendas of political parties," he noted. "Ordinary people are taxed heavily, but the rich are not. Poverty hasn't been tackled."

Mike asked Grant Morgan and Matt McCarten to make opening statements.

'Grassroots liberation'

Grant Morgan, secretary of Socialist Worker, spoke about how corporate imperialism is inflicting barbaric wars, ecological catastrophes and mass misery on global humanity.

"Our objective must be grassroots liberation from corporate imperialism," he declared. "But that's not what you hear from NZ Labour. Their leaders have adopted corporate values."

The Greens want to go into coalition with Labour, following the same course which collapsed the Alliance, said Grant. While the Maori Party is a mass break from Labour, it will attract only a section of workers. And, after the election, arguments will break out about whether the Maori Party should promote grassroots liberation or be a respectable opposition within capitalism.

The last few months have seen the first general workers' fightback since unions were crushed in 1991, noted Grant. "While the flashpoint is low pay, workers are sick of being the invisible people. That mood could be seen when our series of UNITY leaflets hit the spot with workers. The time is right for a Workers Charter that leads into a mass workers' alternative to corporate politics."

Up till now, the New Zealand left has been split between five main traditions:

- Parliamentary left.
- Marxist left.
- Syndicalism - militant non-party unionism.
- Autonomism - non-party community self-organisation, often Maori, from Parihaka to Bastion Point.
- Single issue politics - like HART, anti-war and GE-free.

"A successful Workers Charter movement must transcend these five left traditions," Grant stated. "We must adopt the best practices from each tradition."

The parliamentary left have shown the importance of winning elections as a source of legitimacy among working people.

The Marxist left have shown the importance of confronting the capitalist state, not being co-opted by it. Syndicalism has shown the importance of building a solid mass base inside the unions.

Autonomism has shown the importance of drawing the wider grassroots community into struggles.

And single-issue politics have shown the importance of concentrating our forces around a key issue.

"We must pull the best people from each tradition into a Workers Charter movement," Grant said.

He pointed to related initiatives around the world. Portugal's election saw the Left Bloc gain eight MPs. In France, 1,000 united left committees arose to kill neo-liberal amendments to the European Constitution. A far left Respect MP has been elected in England. Australian socialists and unionists are combining to challenge harsh anti-union legislation.

In Venezuela's unfolding revolution, workers are organising to control the oil industry. A mass movement to re-nationalise Bolivia's gas industry is promoting left unity.

"Each of these movements is different because each has grown out of different national conditions," noted Grant. "But since each confronts an international system of corporate imperialism, they share common features, notably left unity, worker sign-on and radical anti-capitalism."

Grant gave his personal views on what a Workers Charter project might look like.

"For the Charter itself, we should apply the KISS principle - Keep It Short, Socialists." He favoured a five or six point Charter of key demands which would unite all workers, such as a living wage for 40 hours, free education and ending legal bans on our right to strike.

The Charter could be taken out to workers as a petition. Grant also suggested a billboard campaign connected to a website.

He proposed a Workers Charter conference on Labour weekend in October.

"Regardless of the election result, the Workers Charter can become a political rallying point for the working class," Grant said. "A big mobilisation around the Charter will lead towards a mass workers' party, a detailed Workers Manifesto and a broad left paper."

'Something is happening'

Matt McCarten, secretary of Unite Workers Union, spoke about new trends inside the working class.

"It's obvious to unionists that something is happening. On greenfield sites where Unite is organising, 75% or more workers are joining our union, especially the young."

400 joined Unite in four days at McDonalds, and 1,200 at KFC and Starbucks.

The Stagecoach strike had a big ripple effect, Matt reported. "When we go onto sites, workers are asking us - when do we go on strike?"

But the flip side is bosses taking a harder line. "More and more, we're meeting a straight class war response from bosses. They're saying - if you don't like it, you can leave."

Hotels in Auckland are all owned by overseas bosses, he noted. Important decisions are made offshore, and local managers must toe the line.

After one manager's open attack at the negotiating table, Matt commented to his delegates: "Welcome to the class war."

Any left movement without a mass working class base is doomed to failure, he declared. "But you can't present the class with a ready-made programme and expect them to sign up en masse."

So the Workers Charter must be "demands that speak to workers - not a finished manifesto," Matt concluded.

'Get our humanity back'

Mike Treen then invited everyone at the meeting to have a say. No "drafting committee" had made any prior decisions, he said, and everything was up for debate.

Len Parker said new technology brings the assembly line to office staff and other white collar workers, who are now looking to put limits on their exploitation.

"Even though workers make the country run, we've never been treated as human beings," declared Tony Haines, a blue collar unionist. "We've got to get our humanity back. Either we have a Workers Charter, or we have nothing."

"There's unpaid as well as paid workers," noted Elaine West. People will be swamped without a Workers Charter, so "the time is right".

Things will get worse for workers if global capitalism can get away with it, John Aiken predicted. The Charter is a "rallying point" that will help workers go further to confront the capitalist system.

It's "vitally important" that the Charter promotes the right to strike, said Jimmy O'Dea, a retired job delegate. "When workers walk off the job, they begin to realise their own power."

The Workers Charter should be "simple but inspiring," Joe Carolan stated. While the Charter must be practical to connect with the working class, it should also reflect the "big picture" which is often young people's entry point into politics.

"Workers need something to inspire them," said Anna Keene. They will be "massively" inspired by a Workers Charter that fights for things like free health and education.

"Workers never get any opportunity to have their voices heard," declared Pat O'Dea. So the Charter should aim to "increase democracy" in addition to raising bread-and-butter demands.

Workers responded "very favourably" to the idea of a mass workers' party in the UNITY leaflets, reported Vaughan Gunson. During the election campaign, billboards should promote a Workers Charter.

"We need solidarity with similar struggles in other countries," said Sam Quayle. NZ activists must link up with overseas movements to counter the propaganda of corporate politicians like Bush and Blair.

The Workers Charter is a "very practical step in showing support for workers' rights," commented Jennifer Francis. It should contain five or six points that all workers easily grasp.

The Charter should revolve around "real things for real people," said Paul Carrucan. One demand should be a living wage for a 40 hour week.

RAM won an Auckland Regional Council seat by mobilising "around a few simple demands," Stuart Fancy related. The Workers Charter should do likewise. It shouldn't be too complicated.

'End game'

After the open discussion and a whiteboard brainstorming session, Matt McCarten put forward these "end game" strategy proposals:

- The Workers Charter movement must stand with workers' struggles.
- It must be independent of the Labour Party.
- It must become a mass workers' party in the not-too-distant future.

Meeting decisions

By consensus, the meeting decided to:

- Set up a Steering Committee for the Workers Charter movement.
- Ask the Steering Committee to propose and circulate Charter ideas.
- Hold a Workers Charter conference on Labour weekend in October.

STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee of 20 emerged from the Workers Charter meeting. They are (in alphabetical order): Rachel Asher, Paul Carrucan, Cathy Casey, Luke Coxon, Stuart Fancy, Cecil Fowler, Roger Fowler, Jennifer Francis, Chrissy Holland, Robyn Hughes, Maria Humphries, Daphne Lawless, Matt McCarten, John Minto, Grant Morgan, Pat O'Dea, Sam Quayle, Melody Shinnock, Mike Treen, Elaine West.

SA letter of protest to the Scottish Parliament

The following letter was sent by the Socialist Alliance to the Scottish Parliament on August 11, 2005.

Mr George Reid, Presiding Officer
Queensberry House, Scottish Parliament
Holyrood, Edinburgh
EH99 1SP Scotland
Email: presiding.officer@scottish.parliament.uk

Dear Mr Reid,

The Socialist Alliance (Australia) is writing to register our strong objection to the decision on June 30 to suspend and strip the pay and allowances of four Scottish Socialist Party parliamentary representatives for the month of September. We consider the four MSPs' actions that precipitated the penalties to be entirely consistent with democratic principles and conduct.

The SSP's Colin Fox, Frances Curran, Rosie Kane and Caroline Leckie were merely demanding that First Minister Jack McConnell carry out the will of the parliament by defending the right to protest peacefully against the G8 leaders at Gleneagles on July 6. Five months earlier, the Scottish Parliament passed a motion supporting the right of people to protest at the G8 summit, yet just six days before the planned protest, official permission still had not been granted for the protest to go ahead.

We also note our objection to the fact that the SSP MSPs were tried in their absence, without due process, right of appeal or any of the basic human rights enshrined in law.

The financial suspensions will mean that 28 members of staff, who were not involved in the protest, will also not be paid. Furthermore, 130,000 voters will be denied a voice in the Scottish Parliament throughout September.

The ban and financial penalties imposed on the SSP MSPs are entirely inconsistent with democracy, freedom of speech and the right to protest, and we urge you to lift them immediately.

Sincerely,

Lisa Macdonald
for the Socialist Alliance National Executive
cc: Scottish Socialist Party
70 Stanley Street, Glasgow
G41 1JB Scotland
Email: scottishsocialistparty@btconnect.com

National ID card - a threat to civil liberties, not terrorists

The Socialist Alliance National Executive issued the following statement on July 2, 2005:

The Howard government is using the recent terrorist bombings in London as a pretext to re-introduce the idea of a national identity card. If this idea became reality, it would spell the death of civil liberties in Australia.

Coalition and Labor politicians alike claim that a national ID card would help prevent terrorist attacks in Australia. This is a complete furphy - knowing who someone is and knowing their intentions are two totally different things.

The only research conducted on the relationship between ID cards and terrorism has found no evidence of a connection between the cards and successful anti-terrorism measures. Of the 25 countries that have been most adversely affected by terrorism since 1986, 80% have national ID cards.

While an ID card won't prevent terrorist attacks, the national identity database that would be required to make the card work would greatly increase governments' information about and control over all our lives.

Britain's ID card legislation offers a glimpse of what we could be in for if the proposal for an Australian ID card goes ahead. The identity database includes more than 50 categories of information that would be required from every person, including: name, previous names or aliases, date and place of birth, address and previous addresses, times of residency at these addresses, residential status and previous residential statuses, photograph, fingerprints, other biometrics (eg: iris recognition), signature, nationality, entitlement to remain in Britain, passport numbers, work permit numbers and driver's licence.

Information about individuals' religion and/or political affiliations could easily be added, making it much easier for the state to target particular groups and communities for "special treatment". Australia's history contains many instances of such abuses of personal information, including the blacklisting of Communist Party members and supporters from any sort of waged work in the 1940s and '50s.

Under the British bill, police organisations, security services, the tax department and Department for Work and Pensions, and customs and excise can access the database. Further, the massive data-matching power of computers and the prevalence of hacking makes the possibility of individuals being profiled without their knowledge or consent very real.

To add insult to injury, The London School of Economics has estimated that the costs of the card would be 400 pounds for 10 years - a cost that would be borne by cardholders themselves.

In New Zealand, Canada, Scotland and the United States, national ID card schemes have been decisively rejected by the public. When the Hawke Labor government tried to introduce the "Australia Card" in the 1987 it was defeated by big public protests. We need to do that again.

The Socialist Alliance:

- demands that the federal Coalition government, in the interests of protecting the civil liberties of every person in Australia, withdraw its proposal for a national identity card;
- calls on the federal government to guarantee that the new Medicare card, to be distributed to 11 million Australians next year, will not be used to introduce a national identity card by "the back door";
- calls on the federal Labor opposition and all state Labor governments to actively oppose the introduction of a national identity card in any form, and encourages all ALP members to actively campaign against it within their party.

London bombings – the price of the 'war on terror'

The Socialist Alliance issued the following statement on July 8, 2005:

The Socialist Alliance condemns outright the horrific bombings in London yesterday and expresses our solidarity with all the victims and their families and friends.

The bombings are in no way a blow against imperialist exploitation and oppression. The majority of those killed and wounded in London will have opposed the imperialist leaders' wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, and many will have supported the huge protests against world poverty in Scotland this week. Meanwhile the G8 leaders were safe behind fortified walls, protected by thousands of police and armed forces, plotting how to entrench their exploitation of the oppressed peoples of the world.

For Tony Blair, George Bush, John Howard and Co, the London bombing, like those in Bali, Madrid and 9/11 itself, is not a tragedy but an opportunity. It is already being used to whip up "anti-terrorist" hysteria and to try to silence the now far-reaching condemnation of the imperialists' wars and occupations, in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine in particular.

Yesterday's horrific events reveal yet again that the claims by Blair, Bush and Howard that their "war on terror" has made the world a safer place are entirely false. In fact, the "coalition of the willing" has created more, not less, terrorism. Since the formal declaration of the war there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of major terrorist attacks.

Terrorists are not born with terrorist ideas; they are produced by lives of repression, violence, poverty and humiliation. The London tragedy is one more reflection of the universal violation of democratic and human rights by

the imperialist system. For so long as global inequality and injustice continue, countless thousands more innocent people will die needlessly.

The Socialist Alliance will continue to campaign for the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, and for an end to Israel's occupation of Palestine. This is the most effective way to make the world a safer place.

Meanwhile, we will stand shoulder to shoulder with the Middle Eastern and Muslim communities against every xenophobic attack and continue to campaign for the repeal of all state and federal "anti-terror" laws, laws which do nothing to reduce the risk of terrorist attack but do drastically reduce democratic rights and are being systematically used against Middle Eastern and Muslim Australians in particular.

No Australian troops to Afghanistan!

The Socialist Alliance issued the following statement on July 15, 2005:

The Australian government's decision to send a 150-strong Special Forces Task Group to Afghanistan will not make life better for the people of Afghanistan, nor will it make the world safer from the threat of terrorist bombings or war. This military intervention should be totally opposed by the anti-war movement and all progressive people.

This deployment will help the Bush and Blair governments prop up the puppet regime of President Harmid Karzai, which was installed by the US occupation forces in 2001. US occupation forces in Afghanistan have been involved in killings, torture and other abuses of prisoners well before the exposure of torture in Abu Ghraib and other US-run prisons in Iraq, according to Human Rights Watch.

The Karzai regime is based on a coalition of reactionary warlords. These warlords and their private armies have ruled much of Afghanistan for years, in the words of John Pilger, through "fear, extortion and monopolising the opium poppy trade". Opium production has increased seven-fold under the Karzai regime. Karzai is protected around the clock by US Special Forces bodyguards.

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), which is famous for bravely campaigning for the rights of women even during Taliban rule, has criticized Western media for ignoring the killing, looting, corruption, bribery, abduction, rape, stoning of women, drug cultivation and trafficking, and the stealing of billions of dollars of foreign aid under Karzai. Instead of being put on trial, the criminal warlords have been appointed to key government posts.

Australian Labor Party opposition leader Kim Beazley has applauded this latest reactionary troop deployment, boasting that the ALP had long called for Australian troops to be sent back to Afghanistan to "finish the job".

Socialist Alliance condemns this return to "shoulder-to-shoulder" bi-partisan support for the neo-conservative Bush administration's permanent war policy. We call upon trade unions, most of which still donate millions of dollars each year to the ALP, to repudiate this shameful stance by the Labor opposition.

The Socialist Alliance encourages all progressive people to actively oppose this latest troop deployment, and to join the anti-war movement's campaign to force the Australian government to acknowledge and act on the majority public opposition to Australian troops' presence in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Staying in touch with SA's national committees & activities

The new National Executive held its first meeting on July 17, 2005. To help branch and state committees, and all members, have access to the new National Executive, the following decisions were made at that meeting:

- (i) To use invitations to National Executive meetings liberally to better involve and draw on the experiences of members playing important roles in particular areas of SA's work.
- (ii) That proposed agenda items be notified to all NE members by email no less than one week before the scheduled NE meeting. Emergency matters can be accepted with the assent of the majority of those attending the NE meeting.
- (iii) That substantive motions for voting on by the NE be circulated no less than 3 days in advance of the relevant NE meeting.
- (iv) That the NE meeting minutes be circulated to all NE members, and all national, state and branch committees, within one week of the meeting.

National office bearers/positions

The July 17 NE meeting also elected the following positions, which are directly accountable to the NE:

(i) **Neville Spencer** was re-elected as the Socialist Alliance's national treasurer.
Email Neville at: nationaltreasurer@socialist-alliance.org.

(ii) **Lisa Macdonald** was elected as the Socialist Alliance's part-time national coordinator.

Email Lisa at: national_office@socialist-alliance.org

(iii) **Peter Boyle** was elected as the Socialist Alliance's national web site manager.

Email Peter at: web_team@socialist-alliance.org

National Executive members' contact details

Below are the contact details for all National Executive members, and the national working committees they are members of. Members are very welcome to contact any NE member at any time to raise ideas, proposals, etc for consideration by the NE or the relevant national working group:

Sue Bolton (National Trade Union Committee Convener): sue_bolton@hotmail.com

Peter Boyle (national web site manager): peterb@dsp.org.au

David Glanz (Seeing Red Editorial Board): dglanz@optusnet.com.au

Tim Gooden (National Trade Union Committee): miteus@bigpond.com

Pip Hinman (National Anti-war Committee): piph@greenleft.org.au

Mark Lockett (National Refugee Rights Committee): mlockett@bigpond.com

Kieran Latty: kr_latty2002@yahoo.co.uk

Lisa Macdonald (National Membership & Finances Committee): lisam@dsp.org.au

Alex Miller (SA-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board): amiller@scmp.mq.edu.au

Dick Nichols (Seeing Red managing editor): dicknichols@dsp.org.au or seeingredgraphics@socialist-alliance.org

Dave Riley (National Membership & Finances Committee, and SA-GLW Editorial Board): dhell2@optusnet.com.au

Melanie Sjoberg (National Trade Union Committee): msanddj@chariot.net.au

Alison Thorne a.thorne@bigpond.com

Sam Watson (National Indigenous justice spokesperson) sam.watson@uq.edu.au

NT representative: darwin@socialist-alliance.org

ACT representative: canberra@socialist-alliance.org

Tasmania representative: hobart@socialist-alliance.org

National campaign e-lists for members' information and discussion

All SA members are welcome to join any or all of the following campaign discussion e-lists for Socialist Alliance members around the country. Just send a blank email message to:

Women's liberation e-list: [sawomensrights-subscribe @yahoogroups.com](mailto:sawomensrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

Indigenous justice e-list: saindigrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Refugee rights e-list: sarefugee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.au

Sexuality rights e-list: sasexualityrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Making public statements for SA

The following guidelines relating to the issuing of public statements on behalf of the Socialist Alliance were passed by the National Executive on July 17, 2005:

- (i) Where an issue arises on which SA has an adopted position, media releases and public statements reflecting that position may be issued by any branch, state or national committee or the national coordinator.
- (ii) Where SA does not yet have a clear position on an issue, the NE must be consulted before any public statement is issued. In such cases, NE members shall be given at least 48 hours to respond to draft statements. The NE shall try to reach consensus on the statement, and shall be considered approved only if at least 8 NE members email back in favour.
- (iii) The NE recommends to state and territory committees that they elect spokespeople to profile SA on a range of issues.