

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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It's time to stand up

By Sara Moss, Gold Coast branch

The following letter was sent by Sara to all members of the Socialist Alliance branch on the Gold Coast. We were inspired by her message and thought you would be too.

Dear Comrades

The sheer volume of email I am receiving from the progressive lists I am subscribed to online, about the war this government is waging against workers' rights, political rights, women's reproductive rights and the list goes on, can seem overwhelming. It appears that far from using their absolute power in both houses responsibly (the smirking promise of the Prime Minister), the Coalition government has wasted no time in launching a full-scale attack on the hard-won rights of the working class. The proposed changes to Australian electoral systems and the "anti-terror laws", combined with the "IR reform" platform and "welfare to work" regime paint a very bleak picture of our immediate future under this government. Add to this, the rising influence of the religious right and the picture is bleaker still.

All this has led me to a very sobering conclusion: the future we have feared, the one that seemed too extreme to contemplate, is arriving and arriving faster than many of us could ever have imagined.

In the face of all this, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Comrades in this branch are all personally affected and the struggles in our own lives as subjects of this oppressive regime sometimes leave us so beaten down and exhausted that we have no energy left for the more important struggle.

Of course, the ruling class knows this, which is why their tactics are so successful. Comrades in this branch are directly affected by the punitive welfare regime, by casualisation of their workplaces and falling incomes, by job insecurity and high rents, and by racism encouraged by political leaders and the media. The system is demanding more and more of all of us for less and less. Even comrades who are better off financially are still in positions where their lives are determined by forces outside of their control.

Being a socialist is certainly not choosing the easy road. An easier choice, at least in the short term, would be to do nothing, to accept our lot in life, put our heads down and to survive the best way we can, caring only for ourselves and our immediate friends and family. The reason we continue the struggle is because we believe a better world than this is not only possible but necessary. Another reason is that we know acceptance and apathy is only an easier choice in the short term. History tells us that what the ruling class get away with today will only intensify their attacks on us tomorrow.

The road to social change seems a very long one from our vantage point. We are living in dark times and if this seems a dramatic statement, try to consider just these few things from a more distanced perspective - project yourself to an imagined brighter time in the future and take a look back:

We live in a country that locks up refugees and children in prisons

We live in a country that deports its own citizens

We live in a country that arrests and deports an activist for peace

We live in a country that wages war for profits

We live in a country where people work full-time for wages that cannot support them or their families

We live in a country where the unemployed are forced to work for meagre benefits

We live in a country where over 100,000 people are homeless

We live in a country where the indigenous have no representation of their own

We live in a country where the indigenous still die at forty

We live in a country where the sick cannot get medical treatment if they don't have the money to pay for it

We live in a country dominated by the interests of multinational corporations and the government that represents them - NOT US

This exercise can serve an important purpose. While it might at first appear to just emphasise the brutal truth of our time, it can also assist us to put our own personal struggles into a wider perspective.

Our own liberation lies in solidarity with our comrades and action to change this bleak picture for everyone. Of course, this change will not happen overnight. At times, it seems our progress is too slow and we struggle to complete even the smallest tasks we set ourselves. There are many reasons for this, but I think it is important for us to keep moving forward.

We have already achieved some very important goals. We have established the first socialist organisation (ever) on the Gold Coast. We have held regular meetings and begun some important campaign work on the issue of casual and low-paid work. We have rallied under our own banner against the war in Iraq and will do so again against the IR changes. We have held a stall at Griffith University challenging that institution's conservative stance on political organising. We have designed a website and campaigning materials, and we have begun to function as a branch of the Socialist Alliance.

These are just some of the things we have achieved as a group. The wider effect is the influence individual members have had in their workplaces - in arguing the socialist case and promoting the importance of joining trade unions.

Of course there is so much we need to do and the goal of social change in a place like the Gold Coast can seem almost impossible. In light of the intensified attack by the ruling class on our basic rights, I think we need to place a much greater emphasis on recruiting new members. There really is strength in numbers and we need to build the capacity of the branch to deal with the challenges of the future. At present, there is a small core of branch members who do most of the organising and if they are temporarily unable to complete tasks, branch progress slows considerably. Greater numbers will mean a greater capacity to share the workload and to get things done. It will also mean we can plan more visible activities on the Gold Coast. You literally can't move these days on the Coast without security guards or police breathing down your neck.

In recruiting new members we also need to raise our level of political discussion. We need to be able to offer a credible alternative to apathy and inaction! We have already started on this area with the election of Greg to the role of Literature Officer at the AGM. At the recent branch meeting there were a whole range of reading materials available. This is a very positive step for the branch.

Finally, I would just like to say, as most, if not all of you know, I have a serious illness and live on a disability support pension. I am just one of many in a category targeted by this government for so-called "reform". We have been vilified by the government and their lapdogs in the commercial media as "malingerers with bad backs". Of course, comrades know that nothing could be further from the truth.

The truth is, poor people with illnesses and disabilities are an easy target for this bullying government. The effect of this in my own life has been to create uncertainty, fear, stress and a worsening of my illness. What saves me from a descent into depression and despair is the knowledge that this is not just my fight or the fight of other sick people. This is just one aspect of their attack on our class as a whole. In solidarity we will fight to defeat them!

In solidarity forever!

Sara Moss

Secretary, Gold Coast Socialist Alliance

Why I am not the same class as an Indonesian worker

By Carl Kenner, Adelaide branch

Chris Slee raises some good points about the relative privilege of Australian workers compared with workers overseas such as those our comrade Dita Sari is trying to organise in Indonesia. This is an issue that has been bothering me for some time, and I have yet to see any answers that I am ethically comfortable with. Mostly we just like to pretend this issue doesn't exist, or we try to prevent jobs going overseas by stopping other countries from being able to offer cheaper wages in order to compete.

The difference in privilege is so great that it is starting to look very much like a class difference. According to Chris's statistics, an Australian worker could employ 40 Indonesian workers to do absolutely nothing, and still be 10 times as rich as an Indonesian worker.

I suspect I could become a genuine capitalist in Indonesia, should I choose to do so.

While I am supposedly a member of the same working class as an Indonesian worker, the truth is I don't even have to work at all. That's right, I can live quite comfortably in my half a million dollar mansion here, with all the latest luxuries, and even travel the world without ever having worked a day in my life. I can live entirely off the labour of others. Now obviously a lot of Australians are not in quite that position, but it is often rather different for most

Australians from the you-must-take-whatever-job-you-are-given-or-you-starve-to-death situation facing workers around the world.

Of course my class privileges don't stop there. I actually get to dictate how the world is run. Everyone in the world has to speak my language and embrace my culture. Not only that, I am one of the select few that actually gets to vote on how the world is run. The big business class allows this because they know that most people like me will consider themselves to be in the same privileged class as big business. While workers in Indonesia most certainly will not see themselves that way.

Jobs are a resource that is in short supply. There are not enough jobs for everyone, because nobody has organised for the work to be done to meet the needs of the majority of the world's population. The majority of people in the world have no money to buy things they need, and as such there is no point in creating jobs to meet those people's needs. Yet there is no attempt made by the first world's working class to share these few available jobs with other people around the world who need them.

Trying to protect "our" jobs from people in the third world has devastating consequences for their people.

It seems quite clear to me that China is benefiting enormously from "stealing" "our" jobs. A people who previously had nothing, now have their own purchasing power. And now that some people there have jobs and can actually buy stuff, there is a market for other people to provide products for their needs, and thus even more jobs for everyone.

And if some Indian computer programmer gets a job that I wanted, then it is going to be much better for everyone than if I take a job that they wanted.

This is very different from domestic union politics. For example in the MUA dispute there is a choice between two sets of workers: The "scabs" who are prepared to work for less, and the unionists who won't play that game. Whichever

workers we choose to support, the other group will suffer equally. But the benefit to the unionists keeping the jobs is SO MUCH MORE than the benefit if the "scabs" get the jobs. So the choice is easy.

But internationally, we can't just give the jobs to those who will fight for the highest salaries. This is because the workers who are prepared to work for so much less will suffer A LOT MORE if they don't get the job, than the workers who can fight for high salaries. Workers who will work for cheap do so because they NEED the jobs a lot more, not just because they are less organised or unprepared to fight.

While I'm on this topic, I'd also like to point out that our strict class politics which lump all workers together, tend to be a bit racist, and sometimes sexist. The fact is there are huge racial and sexual divisions in the world which are often more important than the class differences.

An example of the amusing ways people sometimes apply class politics, is to the issue of Palestine and Israel. A lot of socialists in the Alliance are under the false impression that the key issue here is for Israeli and Palestinian workers (who they believe are in the same class) to rise up together against their common oppressors. Dream on. Palestinians and Israelis will be rolling on the floor with laughter at that idea. Israeli workers know that their dream of a Jewish state depends on subjugating and oppressing Palestinians, and that is what they do. Palestinians are barely even in the working class, since Israel bans Palestinians from having any industry and most Palestinians have no jobs. To lump them all together as the same class with the same interests is a joke. Which is why Palestinians are happy to blow up the Israeli workers who spend their free time pointing guns at Palestinian heads and ordering them around.

This is not to say that there isn't a Palestinian ruling class who have different interests from the Palestinian would-be workers. There is a separate class of Palestinians who are in positions of power and would happily stab the workers in the back. But Palestinian workers probably regard these rulers as being no different than the Israeli workers.

Sexism seems historically to have meant that men and women were not in the same class. I cannot see how women in societies where they couldn't participate in the workforce could be considered part of the working class. They would have a very different class role from their male partners.

Anyway, this article has more questions than answers, so feel free to clear up any of the issues I have raised. Sorry if it is a stupid question or I have caused any offence.

Report on the Marrickville by-election

By Pip Hinman, SA candidate for Marrickville

Newly installed NSW Premier Morris Iemma decided to call the three by-elections soon after taking over the leadership of the NSW ALP. He wanted to take advantage of the honeymoon period for the "new-look" government, and before he started to map out in detail his neo-liberal cost cutting, and support for the federal government's terror laws.

SA had been discussing the possibilities of standing in Marrickville, where the left has a good profile, and in Macquarie Fields if one of the locals agreed to run for us. When the campaign turned out to be three weeks' duration, it became clear that we did not have the resources to do both, and the state SA leadership recommended we pool resources and run in Marrickville only.

The Marrickville and Central Socialist Alliance branches called an emergency meeting (given the considerable geographic cross-over) on August 23 and discussed the possibilities.

Members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective argued that SA should run, but that we should also announce we would be giving our preferences to the Greens because they had the best chance of breaking Labor's hold on the seat. We argued that if SA didn't run in an area where we do a lot of our week-to-week stalls and where we are already known for our campaign work in a range of social movements, we would be forfeiting an opportunity to let people know SA is still around, and to advance our campaign against the proposed new federal IR laws.

The International Socialist Organisation argued that SA should not stand, but should support the Greens. At a prior SA National Executive meeting, David Glanz from the ISO argued the same, but added that this did not stop SA from issuing leaflets around the IR campaign and other matters. Mark Lockett, an independent SA NE member, and members of the DSP argued that if we were going to produce SA leaflets, indicating support for the Greens, it didn't make sense not to run. Given the SA NE didn't have any decision-making authority on this question (branches have this power under the constitution), the NE didn't take a position.

The ISO argued that SA would act as a spoiler to the Greens, channeling votes away from them. They said that the Greens did not want SA to run, and quoted AEC figures which showed that in the 2003 state election some 40% of SA preferences exhausted at SA even though the SA how-to-vote directed second preference to the Greens. (At that election, the Greens did not come close to winning the state seat, but nevertheless received 28.5%, a big increase from 1999 when they got 11.8%.)

This argument, however, must be considered in context: SA had the donkey position on the Marrickville ballot paper in the 2003 election (and received 2.7% of the vote). According to the experts, the "donkey" (at the top of the ballot) is worth anywhere from 0.5%-2%, but generally considered to be around 1% in areas where people understand the voting system. This would account for most of the SA votes that exhausted after "1".

When the ISO comrades lost the vote on not running in the Marrickville by-election they then tried to argue that if the DSP "was really in favour of left unity" we should support an ISO candidate. They lost that vote too.

Focus on IR

Because Howard's federal workplace relations legislation is looming, and is of huge concern to all working people, including in the Marrickville electorate, and all Labor state governments have said they oppose the pending laws it, SA decided to focus in the short time we had on the campaign around the federal IR laws.

This is the one national campaign for which SA has been getting a good profile at the major rallies and protests this year, and where we have differentiated ourselves from the Greens.

The Marrickville SA "campaign" was in the form of an "open letter" to Premier Iemma calling on his government not to co-operate with the federal IR laws. It generated a good response, and the Green's candidate Sam Byrne signed on early, as did a few other leading Greens, and many unionists. (see Appendix below)

At the main "meet the candidates" meeting, organised by Marrickville Council, there was much concern about how the state government would counter the new federal workplace laws. This meeting attracted some 180 people to the Petersham Town Hall to hear six of the nine candidates. The audience was only allowed to ask questions, and only allowed to direct to up to three candidates – invariably this meant that the ALP, Greens and SA were answering questions. The Democrats didn't really get a look-in after their support for Howard's Workplace Relations Act and GST. A number of Greens congratulated SA on the presentation – including Sylvia Hale who said that ours had the best content "by far" – and some saying that they would make use of the preference system to vote for us first and then the Greens.

People were clearly very concerned about the new IR laws. While Carmel Tebbutt avoided making the issue central to her "caring and committed" campaign, she had to answer some questions about it, and received good applause when she said that Labor was considering a High Court challenge to the new IR laws.

At the three candidates meetings she attended, Tebbutt had to field a barrage of questions about Labor's education cuts – to TAFE, to children with learning difficulties, to the disability support services and to her acquiescence to a homophobic campaign run by the *Telegraph* against anti-homophobic educational material in schools. The disability support teachers followed Tebbutt around for much of the two weeks, as did teachers of children with special needs whose programs have been slashed by Labor. The education minister had a lot of explaining to do, but sincerity and truthfulness were not her strong points.

During the short by-election campaign, the Victorian government signed on to the TAFE federal funding bill, following in the footsteps of Queensland and WA state ALP governments. This was an issue for the 90 or so TAFE teachers and students at a candidates' morning tea at Petersham TAFE, where Tebbutt was again given a grilling, even if polite, by the TAFE teachers there. SA made the point that unionists had to keep the pressure on the ALP after this by-election to ensure that NSW does not follow Victoria's lead. The Teachers' Federation representative who organized the meeting said later he was barracking for SA!

SA also addressed a meeting "IR is a state issue", organised by the ASU, along with three other candidates (Greens, Communist League, standing as an independent, and the Democrats). SA comrades initiated this meeting, which had been given the thumbs up by the ASU state secretary Sally McMannus, as the first project of a new team of ASU activists. Carmel Tebbutt sent her apologies, and at the last minute so did McMannus. However the meeting of some 50 activists was useful to talk through a little more the tactics needed in the campaign against the federal IR laws. The ASU crew who organised the meeting has been shifted closer to SA, and some are likely to join SA.

With Labor so worried about losing the election, they pulled out all stops. The PSA, AMWU and the ETU sent letters to their members in Marrickville urging them to support the ALP. The PSA is not even affiliated to the ALP, and it caused some allies of SA in the PSA and the AMWU to make an issue out of the directive. Tebbutt's campaign involved at least four mail-outs (at around \$25,000 each), and numerous huge colourful leaflets in the letter-box. Labor accused the Greens of "dirty tricks" but it was Labor who was spotted letter-bowing for the Democrats, as that party was exhausting at 1, and which would limit some votes going to the Greens.

Labor also had many of its senior officials on polling booths – and not for a few minutes, as in the past. In some cases they spent a good half day on the booths, including Meredith Burgmann, the Upper House ALP speaker, who spent six hours on a polling booth on King Street. Labor also mobilised a range of ethnic speakers to person the booths and speak to the Chinese, Vietnamese, Greek and other communities about voting Labor. This was particularly apparent in Marrickville suburb, where the Greens didn't do as well as Labor. Elsewhere, the push was on for everyone to vote Green and get the first Green MP into a lower house state seat. The Greens beat the ALP in nine out of 25 booths. The SA vote was higher where the Greens did well, indicating a more conscious vote for SA is likely to have come from more left-wing Greens.

Feedback to SA from outside our ranks from the meetings, the streets stalls, letter-boxing (we did about a half of the electorate) was encouraging. Our call for a significant boost in transport, education and health service infrastructure with funds that could be borrowed and paid off over time went down well. SA also campaigned around free, or close to free, public transport, arguing that the health and environmental dividends from such a measure could end up being a net saving. This also differentiated us from the Greens, who tended to stick to the call for an expansion of services but stayed shy of talking up taxing the big end of town. The Greens did, however, take on board our argument that the funds could come from borrowings, and be paid back over generations, as happened when the rail infrastructure was first set up.

SA's campaign also included some "street heat" in the form of a 70-strong speak-out in front of the local Neighbourhood Centre the same day that US peace activist Scott Parkin was deported after having his visa revoked. The action called on the Iemma government not to cooperate with the federal terror laws, and it also heard from Sam Byrne,

the Greens candidate, a teacher unionist from Canterbury-Bankstown, a representative from Muslims for Peace, local anti-war activists and others.

The Greens had organised an action around same-sex rights a week earlier, attracting around 10-15 people, and a bicycle ride through the electorate attracting many more.

The Democrats were completely lack-lustre and disgraced themselves at a Nature Conservation Council candidates' meeting by arguing in favour of user-pays roads and tolls. They did not allocate preferences.

Neither did the Communist League independent candidate, who talked up class and union issues but largely in the abstract, allocate preferences. Asked why, the Communist League said that they were not "into parliamentarist politics and game playing".

The Democrats received 2.73%, the CL independent 0.4% and Save our Suburbs, an outfit devoted to protesting high-rises in the suburbs and which preferred the Greens, got 1.38%. Socialist Alliance received 1.54%, or 504 votes.

The Greens' campaign

Did our campaign cut across the Greens' campaign? The evidence shows that it did not. Our non-sectarian approach gained us a hearing with some Greens members who told us they preferred SA's "non-politician" approach and policies to the Greens' more traditional campaign. Some said they intended giving us preferences over the Greens. These were, of course, the very conscious types who have seen us in action over the years, but who were also somewhat critical of the Greens' attempts to focus on votes at all costs.

As mentioned, SA announced at the very beginning that we wanted to help the Greens win the seat, and a majority of Green activists we came across were sympathetic to our decision to run. Scrutineers from the Greens and SA reported that the majority of those voting for SA followed our how-to-vote to give Greens second preferences, with a small number giving it to the ALP.

Anthony Green wrote in the September 19 *Sydney Morning Herald* that given the Liberals did not stand in Marrickville, a number of Liberals would have given their vote to Labor or Greens. He also said that was a significant decline in the number of ballot papers with exhausted preferences – i.e. people who did not preference either of the main contenders, Labor or the Greens (see <http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/byelections-give-spin-doctors-a-field-day/2005/09/18/1126981942346.html>). So the concern that SA's vote would exhaust and therefore deny the Greens a chance of getting in did not materialize. From what can be deduced from the primary vote and the two-party preferred vote, our second preferences more or less went to the Greens.

SA did well to get 1.54% given: the tight time-frame (about two and half weeks of campaigning), the overall push to get the Greens elected, the nine-candidate line up and our extremely tight (around \$1000) budget. We spoke to around 400 people at the meet-the-candidates meetings, and thousands more through the election coverage in two local papers (*Inner West Courier* and the *Glebe*). SA also rated a mention as one of the three "main candidates" (out of nine) in the *SMH* of September 16.

One small indicator of the good work SA has been doing can be relayed by this story. One of the parents told me that that a local school cook who had voted Labor all her life had told them she was going to vote SA because she was so angry about Labor's cuts to public education, and her job specifically. She is one of the few remaining cooks in an inner city pre-school, and she had told me about her sad story of being forced to cope with a miniscule budget - one example of how neo-liberal policies destroy jobs, and lives, especially for those least able to defend themselves. She had fed generations of children in the area, and feels like she's more of a community worker than a cook. At least parents know that their child has had a decent meal at lunchtime, she told me. But the school is trying to get rid of her, orders from above she has no doubt. But the really sad irony is that this person is currently feeding the education minister's own son, and even then cannot get the necessary \$180 a week.

Tebbutt, along with federal environment minister Anthony Albanese and Peter Garrett were all at the popular booth opposite this school for longer than the usual celebrity appearance. This is one of the booths that has turned majority Green over the last few years. When Tebbutt had had enough handing out, she announced she was going over the road (to the school's sausage sizzle) "to show my support for the local school". Meanwhile the hard-working parents were slaving away all day to raise the extra money to allow the school to make ends meet – the result of her government's budget cuts.

Where to now for SA? We should generalise the good experiences from this campaign and seek to generalise the "open letter to the Premier" in other states and territories (SA comrades in Victoria are working on something similar for the November 26 local council elections there). We should also continue to try and find ways of getting SA into the local press, highlighting our campaigns and positions on various federal, state and local government issues.

SA also needs to continue to work closely with the Greens, wherever we can, while finding the ways of putting the case for socialist solutions.

Specifically, we should help build support for the November 15 IR rally. Railway leafleting and SA stalls, and pushing the sign-on letter to the state ALP governments are easy things to organise. We could also consider doing "street heat" protests around the IR laws, and invite Greens, ALP and other union speakers, and collect signatures from passers-by. Without high profile SA union leaders in every city, this type of activity is what SA does best, and it keeps our profile up.

APPENDIX: Open letter to the NSW Premier

Dear Premier Iemma,

The federal Liberal-National government's changes to Workplace Relations legislation will mean the biggest single transfer of power at the workplace in favour of employers. It will hurt working class families and weaken our ability to defend our rights, the environment and our communities.

These laws must be stopped. If we cannot stop them being enacted, we must do all we can to prevent them being enforced.

Your government has given a commitment to challenge these anti-worker laws in the High Court. But you should go further. All Labor state governments should take real action to build the popular resistance to these unjust laws and frustrate their implementation.

We call upon the NSW Labor government to:

1. Guarantee that no state employees will be offered individual contracts, which break down wages and conditions of workers, and destroy workplace solidarity.
2. Repudiate the federal government's demand that all education workers (university and TAFE) must be offered individual contracts to receive federal funding, and that you guarantee that funding from other sources.
3. Give a commitment that state police will not be used to enforce federal government attacks on workers under the new Workplace Relations laws or on construction unions through the Building Industry Improvement Act, or against any workers taking industrial action.
4. Enact State legislation to guarantee unfair dismissal protection for all workers.
5. Repudiate the federal government's attempt to abolish the state industrial system, and enshrine all conditions (long-service leave, penalty rates, allowances, meal breaks, etc) that the federal government wants to strip from awards in NSW legislation.

To add your name to this open letter, email: marrickville@socialist-alliance.org

Why the abortion clinic defense is so important

By Craig R Hall, Wills branch

I write this article in response to the recent vicious attack by Right to Life supporters on three pro-choice clinic defense activists who were protecting the rally on Saturday, September 24 outside the Wellington Parade Fertility Control Clinic (Melbourne). One of the two activists who stood up to the physical assault was Michelle R. She is a member of the Wills branch of the Socialist Alliance and an activist in the Campaign for Women's Reproductive Rights.

As a member of the Wills branch, a CWRR activist, and especially as a Socialist Feminist man whose liberation cannot be realized without the liberation of my sisters, I am impassioned to inspire other SA members to get involved in the clinic defense precisely because of the importance of these Saturday actions.

Some history of what CWRR have been up to in the last year or so might be useful in putting the current clinic defense into context. CWRR takes a multi-issue approach to women's reproductive rights. It is because of this that we are at the coalface of the fight for every woman's right to have full choice in her lives - especially reproductive choice. The CWRR petition made demands for employer-funded maternity leave, equal pay, equal employment opportunity and secure jobs, to free, safe abortion on demand.

Prior to CWRR taking up the clinic defense and reinvigorating this important political activism, the Campaign presented local pro-choice ALP member for Wills, Kelvin Thomson, with over 2000 signatures on May Day, April 30. The petition was multi-issue, making a number of demands for women's reproductive rights.

Then on Saturday, July 30 we successfully rallied at the Bourke St Mall. Our leaflet said it all: "Women will decide their fate!" The rally was organised by SA unionists/reproductive rights activists, as well as being unanimously endorsed by SA's National Fightback Conference. Craig Johnson, who endorsed the rally, could see the comprehensiveness of CWRR's approach.

The rally marched from the Mall to Parliament House passing the Liberal party HQ in a very loud, positive and colourful march with plenty of chanting. It was uplifting for all of us, and with all of the speakers taking up a demand each. It was also important that a number of men were present. On the speaker's platform Union Solidarity Committee member Dave Kerin gave an impassioned speech, clearly making the connections between women's reproductive rights and union rights. By extension he made it clear that these were both working-class issues to be fought for. As Dave stated: "We can never go back...".

Following this success CWRR put the call out for a protest by pro-choice activists to get up the nose of the Right to Life who were holding a weekend conference at Trinity College, opened by a dinner with Barnaby Joyce as keynote speaker. The invited guests had to run the gauntlet of thirty loud and proud pro-choice women and men, as we made them duck under coat hangers to triumphant chants, and an upbeat atmosphere that lasted until the last notorious guest made it through security. At one stage an incensed student came out to inform us that the students who lived on campus were outraged that the conference was going ahead as a money making exercise by the administration.

Following this, CWRR put out the call to restart the clinic defense that had been happening earlier this year. CWRR attended on a Saturday morning in solidarity and we were keen to see the Helpers of God's Precious Infants met with some strong pro-choice voices. After putting out the word wide and far, on Saturday, August 27 a 40-strong politically vocal and energetic abortion clinic defense forced the 50 or so Helpers to cross to the other side of Wellington Parade with their Madonna icon; big, gaudy, brass crucifix; rosaries; and a motley assortment of Catholic fundamentalists. They prayed as hard as their 'Helpers' hearts could, and we chanted hard and in good spirits right back at them.

On our side of the street there was a united front of socialists, anarchists and other pro-choicers that made it safe for women accessing the clinic, as well as the clinic staff. I was shocked to learn that not only did the religious fundamentalists stand in front of the clinic every day from 7.30am to 10.30am to physically harass and intimidate anyone going into the clinic, but that they video women from across the street.

CWRR has been aware that directly confronting the right to lifers was going to escalate from the first rally. We didn't expect physical violence quite so soon. On Saturday September 24 I witnessed other clinic defenders being physically attacked by two anti-choice supporters that were aiming at the rest of the rally when we called out pro-choice chants at the fundamentalists across the road. Before the physical altercation the attackers were spewing sexist and homophobic abuse. It's instructive that on the Channel Nine news footage you saw the larger of the two assailants repeatedly punching Michelle on the ground.

SA unionists already make the connections between the fight for women's reproductive rights and union rights, and by extension working-class struggle in general. An important way in which SA unionists can get involved directly with the clinic defense is by union members taking up the fight for social responsibility.

The Waterside Workers Federation in the 1930s and 1940s successfully stopped Pig Iron Bob Menzies from shipping iron ore to Japan, which had invaded Manchuria, by mobilising the community. The NSW BLF Green Bans in the early 1970s made the connection between their demands and the local community. One more example was the MUA dispute in Melbourne in the late 1990s, where union/community mass action defeated the Howard government's attempt to break the MUA. The clinic defense should be supported by SA unionists acting in solidarity with the community outside of the narrow confines of wages and conditions.

There is a tendency for some union officials to promote and entrench radical labourism, which is the perception (and that's all it is) in the union movement where anything beyond the direct economic interests of white, abled, straight, blue-collar workers is not seen as connected to union demands. This could limit activism in the clinic defense by SA members honestly interested in getting involved, and who would not only add strength and vitality, but also deepen the political quality of the monthly defense.

Further, that SA members reflect the diversity of the rest of the community reinforces our solidarity with each other. From here, I am sure it is easy for SA members (women and men) to make the connection with CWRR's leadership in the clinic defense, which represents the overwhelming majority of the Australian community, and the 70% of Catholic women who believe in the woman's right to choose.

Finally, by getting on board with CWRR and the clinic defense SA members are actually confronting in a very real way the onslaught of the fundamentalist Right, both secular and religious, which was illustrated on September 24 when the nasty underbelly of the Right struck out at our pro-choice forces. This is too important an issue to avoid, especially with the political stakes being raised to a new level. I hope I've pricked your interest, and stirred that fire in your belly so that you are fired up to join us. We need you.

[To join the Socialist Alliance members' women's rights discussion e-list, send a blank email to: sawomensrights-subscribe@yahoo.com]

The future of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy: A submission

The following submission about the future of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, written by the Freedom Socialist Party, was endorsed by the Socialist Alliance National Executive. Many individual members of the SA have also made submissions, which are still being received by the consultants.

September 2005
Mutual Mediations
info@mutualmediations.com
Dear consultants

It is with reluctance that the Freedom Socialist Party - a socialist feminist political party with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous members - is putting forward this submission.

We are reluctant, because we do not support the racist and divisive process of the Federal Government in hiring consultants to make recommendations about the future of the Tent Embassy. We are gravely concerned that this process will be little more than a whitewash designed to give the appearance that a form of consultation has taken place when, in fact, consultation with Aborigines has been less than minimal.

The future of the Tent Embassy is not for the Federal or ACT Governments to decide, it is not for government-appointed consultants to decide. Equally, nor is it for those government-appointed "leaders" who profess to be

acceptable to the assimilationist policies of the Federal Government, and who urge other Aborigines to accept the crumbs from the table of the invaders, to make the decision on behalf of all Indigenous. The future of the Tent Embassy belongs to those whose rights are directly involved in this 33 year protest. The Aboriginal peoples.

Many of our members have visited the Tent Embassy. But for those of us who are Indigenous people and members of the FSP, the Tent Embassy is OUR Embassy and we have a direct stake in its future.

The Freedom Socialist Party strongly supports the concept of an Aboriginal embassy or embassies, as there are many Indigenous Nations on this continent. We recognise the first people of this continent as oppressed nations and we actively defend the right of all these nations to self determination.

When the Tent Embassy was established, by naming it an embassy, the movement zeroed in on the essential point that the sovereignty of Indigenous people must be recognised. This was a powerful challenge to the genocidal assimilationist policies which had predominated. But three and half decades later, genocidal assimilationist policies are back on the political agenda. The Howard Government calls it mainstreaming.

The policies of the current government and the failure to negotiate a Treaty with Australia's Indigenous Nations, makes the Tent Embassy just as relevant today as it was when four young Aboriginal radicals established it in the 1972.

We are opposed to suggestions that the living embassy be removed and that a monument of some kind be placed on the site. The business of the Tent Embassy is not finished and the struggle is a living one. We cannot build a monument on the site until a Treaty has been concluded with each and every Aboriginal Nation and Indigenous Australians are no longer oppressed. Without this, an embassy is needed as a symbol and focus of the ongoing struggle for self determination.

Finally, while we are against the erection of monuments, we do have some ideas for useful facilities which would be a good addition to the site. Facilities such as a new toilet and shower block, a BBQ area and a children's playground would be welcome. The sacred fire must all have its own dedicated area and meet all safety and environmental concerns and legislation We reiterate that such facilities would need to be designed and built in consultation with the custodians of the Tent Embassy.

We recommend that you recommend to those who have hired you that the future of the Tent Embassy must be the business of all the Indigenous peoples of this land along with those directly and currently involved in the Tent Embassy. The Freedom Socialist Party is an uncompromising defender of the right of oppressed nations to self-determination, sovereignty, treaty and social justice As long as the Tent Embassy remains a symbol of struggle for these aspirations, it has our total support.

Yours sincerely

Alison Thorne, Melbourne and Ray Jackson, Sydney , for the Australian section of the Freedom Socialist Party.

[To join the Socialist Alliance members' discussion e-list on campaigning for justice for Indigenous people, send a blank email to: saindigrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com]

Stop the war on civil liberties!: A sign-on statement

The following sign-on statement is being circulated by Socialist Alliance members and supporters to help build the emerging campaign against the federal Coalition and state Labor governments' draconian new "anti-terror" laws, which contain the most major assault ever on civil liberties and democratic rights in Australia.

PM John Howard is using the "war on terror" to promote widespread fear about "terrorists" and "terrorism" in Australia. This is despite the fact that the biggest act of terror being committed today is being carried out by foreign troops, including Australia's, in occupied Iraq.

We condemn the Howard government's reactionary "security" agenda, and the unanimous support of Labor state and territory governments for the draconian federal "anti-terror" laws at the COAG summit on September 27. This represents a bi-partisan attack on our democratic rights.

ALP federal opposition leader Kim Beazley wanted to go further and have all the states adopt what already exist in NSW where the Police Commissioner has the power to order a lock-down whole suburbs, or even cities and states, if it will "substantially assist in preventing the terrorist act".

As civil rights lawyers and activists have pointed out, the major parties have signed onto measures to overturn the presumption of innocence and the right to privacy and which are a direct attack on our political freedoms.

The only people who have so far been charged with a "terrorism offence" are Muslims and all groups that have been banned as "terrorist organisations" under the Criminal Code are organisations that espouse a connection to Islam. It is clear that the new powers are already being mostly used against Muslim Australians, thereby breaching the principle of equality before the law.

But there is every reason to believe that these laws will soon be used against anyone who disagrees with the government - striking workers, anti-corporate protesters, critical journalists, and peace activists.

The arrest and deportation of US peace activist Scott Parkin, on the grounds of "national security", gives some idea of how the state is preparing to use its increased power.

The "national security" and "anti-terror" laws already adopted by state and federal governments have given ASIO and the police forces the power to harass, persecute, prosecute and imprison people with impunity. The new draconian laws are also aimed at "advocacy of terrorism".

But the "anti-terror" laws have done nothing to reduce the risk of terrorist attack, here or in any other country. Their real purpose is to intimidate and silence dissent. In particular, they aim to gag opposition to the imperialists' wars on Iraq, Afghanistan and any other poor country the US and its allies decide to invade.

We, the undersigned, call on Australian government to:

- Repeal all federal "anti-terror" laws;
- Stop the raids on the homes of Muslims, and launch a public education campaign to stop the racist attacks on the Middle Eastern and Muslim communities;
- Demand that the US government immediately return David Hicks, and any other Australians imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, to Australia;
- Drop the charges against Jack Thomas, which are based on "evidence" extracted under torture;
- Not ban any political or religious organisation in Australia;
- Withdraw its national identity card proposal, and guarantee that the new Medicare card not be used to introduce a national ID card by the back door; and
- Reduce the threat of a terrorist attack by immediately withdrawing all military personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Further, we call on the federal Labor opposition and all state Labor governments to act decisively to stop the decimation of democratic rights in Australia by:
 - Repealing state "anti-terror" laws;
 - Reversing their support for the federal ASIO bill and "anti-terror" laws;
 - Committing to not use state police forces to deny civil liberties or silence dissent;
 - Ending "random" police searches of individuals at train stations and all public places;
 - Opposing the introduction of a national identity card in any form.

[For more information, go to: <<http://www.rightsaustralia.org.au/data/Laws%20for%20Insecurity%20Report.pdf>>]

The sign-on statement, and a "Defend civil liberties" petition, can be downloaded from: www.socialist-alliance.org

[To join the Socialist Alliance members' democratic rights campaign discussion e-list, send a blank email to: sademocraticrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com]

Workers face biggest threat in 100 years

Time for action - all out on November 15

The following Socialist Alliance statement was issued in response to the release of the Howard government's "WorkChoices" document on October 9, 2005.

Public opinion is overwhelmingly against the Howard government's proposed new industrial relations laws, announced in its misnamed "WorkChoices" statement. That's why the government has spent the last three months tinkering with its legislation to give the appearance of fairness. And it's why the government and the Business Council of Australia are spending at least \$30 million on an advertising campaign, to try to sell the changes to the public.

Howard has no mandate for these laws. It is urgent that the majority public opposition to this brutal assault on workers' rights and standard of living is shown by massive demonstrations, and industrial action against the corporations that are pushing for these laws.

The ACTU has organised nationwide meetings on Tuesday, November 15. We urge all people who support workers' and union rights to help build and attend these meetings.

To make them as effective as possible, the November 15 meetings must be combined with a nationwide stoppage and mass marches - as an opening step in the campaign to overturn the new legislation.

Howard claims that the legislation is not designed to give bosses advantages over workers. If that was true, he'd have no trouble guaranteeing that no worker would be worse off under the legislation. Instead, Howard says that anyone who is unemployed should just be grateful to get a job, regardless of the pay and conditions.

This legislation demonstrates clearly that the government rules on behalf of a minority - the corporate bosses. Under the new laws, almost all industrial action will be illegal. If workers take such action to defend their jobs, working conditions or right to organise, they face massive fines, the possibility of losing their family home, and even jail.

Howard may be able to get these laws through parliament, but workers and their unions, supported by the community, can prevent these laws from being implemented

A campaign to make the laws unenforceable would be greatly strengthened if the ALP state governments simply refused to implement Howard's laws in the state public sector, and refused to use state police to enforce the laws anywhere. We call on all state governments to do this.

We also call on the federal Labor opposition to commit to fully repeal the laws, including Australian Workplace Agreements, when it is next elected.

For more information about the campaign against the government's attacks on workers' and union rights, and details of the November 15 national day of action, visit: www.socialist-alliance.org

More 'New Orleans' in store for the poor

The following statement on the New Orleans Hurricane Katrina disaster was adopted by the SA National Executive on September 18, 2005.

The Australian Socialist Alliance expresses its deepest, most heartfelt sympathy to all those who lost loved ones in the death, destruction and chaos wrought by Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, Mississippi and other southern states of the USA.

This tragedy is, of course, a natural disaster. However, it is first and foremost a social disaster. The hundreds, maybe thousands, of deaths Katrina produced lie at the door of the Bush administration and the US corporate elite on whose behalf it rules.

This tremendous suffering and loss of life was not inevitable. With proper policies of anti-hurricane defence, loss of human life can be reduced to a minimum. For example, Cuba emerged from six major hurricanes in the seven years between 1996 and 2002 with the loss of only 16 lives. In 2004, a category-five hurricane slammed into the island with 160 mile-an-hour winds causing the destruction of 20,000 houses, yet not a single person died.

(This result is due to the island's comprehensive anti-hurricane defence system which is recognised as a model. For details see Oxfam report *Weathering the Storm* at

By contrast the richest country in the world, where the market and private profit rule, could not defend its own people, even though the effect of a hurricane of Katrina's severity on a city New Orleans — which lies well below sea level and is protected from the sea by a system of levees — has been well understood for years.

In 1998, Louisiana politicians developed a plan — “Coast 2050” — to improve the levee system: the plan was vetoed by the Bush administration after it was approved by Congress.

In 2005, the Bush administration cut the funds for levees and flood control in New Orleans by US\$71.2 million, or 44%. The money was needed to fund Bush's astronomically expensive military misadventure in Iraq.

Moreover, in the mad drive for profit, building developers were allowed to drain vast areas of wetlands along the coast: wetlands that provide a natural barrier and absorbent for the hurricanes to which the area is frequently exposed.

Once Hurricane Katrina hit, the price of all this criminal neglect of basic social infrastructure and community protection was cruelly exposed.

In the face of the crisis, the Bush administration and local authorities simply advised the residents of New Orleans to flee the city. It is estimated that 28% of the city's residents live below the official poverty line. What about the 35% of black households who don't have a car? What about the thousands too poor to afford public transport (if they could find it), where were they to go with no money to pay for accommodation?

Why were thousands of poor people trapped in New Orleans when there were hundreds of trains and buses that could have taken them to safety lying unused as the flood waters rose?

Why was a third of the Louisiana National Guard in the Persian Gulf guarding the rape of Iraq by the likes of Halliburton and Bechtel when it could have been helping to evacuate the city?

Why did the US government order its troops and police to “shoot-to-kill” people merely struggling to survive in a watery hell it had helped to create?

The fact that the government had no evacuation plan is not the result of personal incompetence on the part of Michael Brown, sacked head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or even, indeed, of George W. Bush, the man who sacked him.

It is the natural position of a ruling elite that puts the pursuit of profit above all else, which attacks essential social spending as “big government” and which exhibits brutal racist indifference towards the country's black communities.

Moreover, any government that cared about protecting its citizens against the threat of hurricanes would also have been sensitive to a fact the Bush administration cannot afford to take seriously: the number and severity of hurricanes in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico has been increasing in recent years.

While meteorologists are still divided on the impact of global warming on hurricane activity, there is gathering evidence that this trend may well be helping generate hurricanes of increasing destructive power.

For example, between 1944 and 1996 there were on average 10 named hurricanes per year. In 2004, there were 16 named hurricanes, and there are 20 expected in 2005. According to a recent study in the journal *Nature* by former global warming sceptic Kerry Emanuel, there has been a clear and unprecedented leap in the destructive potential of hurricanes since the early 1990s for which the rising sea surface temperatures brought on by global warming provide the most obvious explanation (see <http://chronicle.com/free/2005/09/2005090803n.htm>).

Yet conservative politicians like Bush and Australian PM John Howard play down the reality threat of global warming and say that the free market, in time, will devise its own solutions to the problem.

Anyone still inclined to believe that should take a careful look at New Orleans. The "plan" that Howard and Bush have for dealing with global warming is the same as the evacuation plan Bush had for New Orleans: it doesn't exist.

In a perceptive comment on the New Orleans disaster, British socialist Alex Callinicos writes: "The aftermaths of such disasters always act as X-rays, exposing the inner faults of the societies where they occur". In a statement to the media at the recent Forbes CEO conference in Sydney, right-wing US politician and former New York mayor Rudi Giuliani said he had a message for the protesters outside: "The way out of poverty is business and capitalism".

The X-ray provided by Hurricane Katrina's devastation of New Orleans and other towns and cities along the Gulf coast reveals how hollow Giuliani's claim actually is. Capitalism cannot solve the problems of poverty, hunger and social catastrophe in the Third World: it increasingly replicates them within the so-called First World.

No to war and terrorism: Australian troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan now!

A statement on the Bali bombing, September 2005

The Socialist Alliance expresses its solidarity with all the innocent victims of the latest Bali bombings, regardless of nationality. However, we also reject and condemn the hypocritical and racist "anti-terrorist" hysteria being whipped up by politicians and the corporate media. Once again, Australian lives are being valued grossly unequally with the lives of people from the Third World.

Horrible as it is, the latest Bali bombing pales next to the daily terror in occupied Iraq. But the corporate media filters the truth about war and terror through the lens of racist hypocrisy.

A May 18 report the Massachusetts-based Project on Defense Alternatives, "Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq", calculated that 30,000 Iraqis have died as a direct result of combat operations by all sides in the Iraq war, with 75% of them having been killed by US-led "coalition" operations.

According to a detailed report by Iraq Body Count, of the 67,365 civilians (most of them Iraqi citizens) who have been reported killed or wounded during the first two years of the occupation, up to 19 March 2005:

- US-led forces were sole killers of 37% of civilian victims.
- Criminals killed 36% of all civilians.
- Anti-occupation forces were sole killers of 9% of civilian victims.
- US military forces accounted for 98.5% of Coalition killings.

Anyone in Australia who is serious about stopping the escalating war and terrorism around the world today needs to face up to the urgent need for the Australian government to withdraw its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. This would be a powerful political blow for the world's biggest promoter of war and terrorism - the government of the United States of America.

We also reject the attempt by Australian state and federal governments to use the so-called "war on terror" as a pretext to destroy civil liberties and democratic rights in Australia. The "national security" and "anti-terror" laws passed by state and federal governments in recent years have given ASIO and the police forces the power to harass, persecute, prosecute and imprison people with impunity.

The Socialist Alliance joins with all those calling on the Australian government to:

- Reduce the threat of a terrorist attack by immediately withdrawing all military personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan;
- Repeal all "anti-terror" laws which attack civil liberties;
- No banning of political, civil or religious organizations.
- Stop the raids on the homes of Muslims, and launch a public education campaign to stop the racist attacks on the Middle Eastern and Muslim communities.

Welfare to work program punishes the poor

The September 18, 2005, National Executive meeting approved the political line of the following statement on the federal Coalition government's new "Welfare to work" scheme. A new national leaflet is being prepared based on this information to help Socialist Alliance members campaign against the welfare attacks.

With its fourth-term agenda, the Howard government has launched a vicious attack on working people, both in and out of work.

Its proposed changes to industrial relations are aimed at crushing the ability of workers to organise collectively, and driving down wages and conditions. Its so-called Welfare to Work initiatives, announced in the federal budget to come into effect in June 2006, go hand in glove with the attacks on union and workers' rights. By forcing sole parents and

many with a disability to work 15 hours a week, the government will ensure a conscripted workforce with no choice but to take the new low wage jobs.

The government argues that people on welfare will be financially better off if they have some paid employment. Under the current system, this is certainly true. But scratch the surface of Howard's plan and we find a scheme designed to cut payments rather than to enhance employment prospects.

The fundamental problem with the government's plan is that it is not a welfare to work strategy, but a welfare to poverty strategy that moves people from one payment onto another lower one. The Australian Council of Social Service estimates that 300,000 people will be worse off after June 2006.

Currently, eligible sole parents and people with a disability receive a pension payment. These payments are structured to enable a mix of part-time work with caring responsibilities or managing a disability. More than half of all sole parent pensioners work part-time and nearly three-quarters do some paid work in any given year.

Under the pension income test, people can improve their circumstances by working part-time. Pensioners have an income-free threshold, which increases with the number of children in their care. Any income earned above this threshold reduces the pension by 40¢ in the dollar.

Pensioners who study are also eligible for an annual Education Entry Payment and a Pensioner Education Supplement, which at current rates is an additional \$31.20 per week.

Under Howard's Welfare to Work plan, sole parents whose youngest child has turned six and disabled people who are assessed as capable of working 15 hours per week will no longer be granted a pension. Instead, they will be required to seek 15 hours of employment per week and placed on an "enhanced" Newstart payment that includes a Pension Concession Card. This payment is \$29 a week less than the pension.

The income-free area is also much lower, does not increase with the number of children and payments will be reduced by 60 cents for every dollar earned from employment - a much harsher taper than the pension. Recipients of this payment are not eligible for the Pensioner Education Supplement.

The impact is that income support will cut out at a much lower level, which will result in the loss of the pension concession card, and all the services and discounts that go with it. Many doctors only bulk bill patients who have a pension concession card.

The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling estimates that a sole parent with one child on the Parenting Payment Single benefit can earn up to \$718 per week before the entitlement to income support cuts out. A sole parent with one child receiving the enhanced Newstart Allowance will only be able to earn \$426 a week before payment of part income support and eligibility for a pension concession card stops.

The NATSEM research also reveals that, under the new system, a sole parent with one child and earnings of \$200 per week faces a cut in payments of \$92 a week when their child turns six. This represents a massive overnight 17% cut in living standards for these families!

There are other implications too. Once a welfare recipient is no longer receiving a disability pension or parenting payment single, they are no longer eligible for the pensioner tax offset. This means that at the same time as their disposable income is being cut by being moved onto Newstart, their tax liability increases.

While those currently receiving pension payments will be able to retain the old payment, this benefit will quickly be eroded. Research by Bob Gregory from the Australian National University shows that a big proportion of sole parents move on and off benefits over a five-year period. For example, if a woman on the pension attempts reconciliation with her former partner and it doesn't work out, she'd only be eligible for the lower Newstart payment when she reclaimed. The same would occur if she got a full-time, fixed term contract job for 6 months and then had to go back on benefits when the job ended.

The government's "reforms" are a cruel sham, introduced as part of a budget that also gave tax cuts to the rich. Strip away the rhetoric about the dignity of work and what we're left with is nothing but a package that will cut incomes to those most in need and force people to take low-paid jobs.

Where is the funding to massively boost child-care places? Where is the support for those seeking further education or retraining? Where are the programs to make public transport and buildings more accessible? Where are the jobs with family friendly conditions or that allow flexibility to manage a disability?

A real welfare to work scheme would:

- establish voluntary well-staffed public programs for those who wish to enter the workforce; no outsourcing of welfare services and renationalise the job network
- provide free, quality, education and training
- tackle workplace accessibility, discriminatory employment policies and other barriers to employment
- retain and strengthen unfair dismissal and anti-discrimination laws
- extend entitlements such as sick leave, carers' leave and annual leave to part-time and casual employees on a pro-rata basis, and guarantee access to family friendly working hours and part-time work
- provide free, quality child-care, holiday and after-school programs, and introduce an employer-funded, national, paid maternity leave scheme
- abolish work for the dole, immediately pay all workers an award wage and abolish all mutual obligation requirements
- address poverty traps to ensure welfare recipients are not slugged when they secure some paid work

- provide a living wage - which enables a decent quality of life, not just survival - for all welfare recipients and their dependants, and automatic indexation of all welfare benefits to cover real costs of living increases.

Reference:

The Distributional Impact of the Welfare-to-Work Reforms Upon Sole Parents - Ann Harding, Quoc Ngu Vu, Richard Percival and Gillian Beer; Report to the National Foundation for Australian Women, August 2005, National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling, University of Canberra.

[To join the Socialist Alliance members' welfare rights discussion e-list, send a blank email to: SA_social_justice-subscribe@yahoo.com]

Free Scott Parkin! Oppose the deportation of visiting US peace activist

The Socialist Alliance issued the following media release on September 11, 2005, as soon as US anti-war activist Scott Parkin was arrested.

Pip Hinman, the Socialist Alliance candidate in the September 17 Marrickville by-election, said today that the detention of visiting US peace activist and teacher, Scott Parkin, was "a taste of the sort of police-state measures that the Howard government is planning to introduce in the name of 'anti-terrorism'. Our civil liberties, and the right to freedom of thought and expression in particular, are under unprecedented threat", she said.

Parkin's six-month visitor's visa was revoked by the Department of Immigration (DIMIA), which claims he is considered a threat to national security.

"Socialist Alliance calls on the federal Labor opposition and all state Labor governments to actively oppose the decimation of democratic rights in Australia by:

- Repealing state "anti-terror" laws;
- Reversing their support for the federal ASIO bill and "anti-terror" laws;
- Committing to not use state police forces to deny civil liberties or silence dissent;
- Ending "random" police searches of individuals at train stations and all public places;
- Opposing the introduction of a national identity card in any form."

Socialist Alliance will be supporting the emergency protest outside Federal Police offices at 110 Goulbourn Street, Sydney on Monday September 12, 5pm. The Socialist Alliance is organising a Speak-out Against Police-state Laws and Racist Scapegoating of the Muslim Community on Thursday, September 15, 5pm. at Newtown Neighbourhood Centre. Speakers include Paul White from Muslims for Peace, Sam Byrne the Greens candidate for Marrickville, Pip Hinman the Socialist Alliance candidate, and representatives from the local and state-wide anti-war groups.

Socialist Alliance to contest Maribyrnong Council elections *Melbourne West district*

The Socialist Alliance is standing candidates in two wards for the November 26 Maribyrnong City Council elections - George Papanastasiou for Sheoak ward and Ben Courtice in Ironbark ward.

The Alliance has two branches in Melbourne's western suburbs, and both are working on the Maribyrnong council campaign. These members intend to bring the Socialist Alliance's street-campaigning, activist approach to the election campaign, using it to raise issues such as the victimisation of Muslims in the name of the "war on terror".

Socialist Alliance members have played prominent roles in the campaigns to defend western suburbs resident Jack Thomas against terrorism charges, for the closure of the Maribyrnong refugee detention center, and in defence of workers and union rights.

Last February, the council organised a public forum on the immigration department's plan to spend \$7 million to expand the detention centre. The meeting adopted a resolution put by the Socialist Alliance calling on the council to oppose the centre's extension and supporting its closure. The SA members now hope to build public momentum for its closure through this election campaign.

The Socialist Alliance welcomes involvement from anyone who wants to support the campaign. If you can help out, or want to find out more, phone (03) 9639 8622 or email: melbwest@socialist-alliance.org

Casual and low-paid workers organise *Gold Coast branch*

Workers Forum is a forum and information site for casual and low-paid workers, created and maintained by casual and low-paid workers in the Socialist Alliance. We created this site to help ourselves and others share information regarding Unions, our rights as workers and general information and ideas and tactics related to work place problems,

solutions and to also share some of our stories. Feel free to post your ideas, share your work stories and experiences, DOB-IN-A-BOSS and share information in the Workers Forum. If you have links that you think would be helpful, please send them to us at: goldcoast@socialist-alliance.org

Visit: www.workersforum.info/ We can also be contacted at 0417 062 844.

Join a Socialist Alliance discussion e-list

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

Civil liberties/democratic rights: sdemocraticrights@yahoogroups.com

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

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

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

Refugee rights: sarefugee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Anti-war: sa_anti-war-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Welfare issues: sa_social_justice-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Green Left Weekly content: saglw_copy-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

Trade unions: There are a range of national e-lists for members of particular trade unions. For more information about the union e-lists, contact the SA national office at: national_office@socialist-alliance.org