

# Alliance Voices

**Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin**

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

# **Socialist Alliance to stand in the Victoria Park by-election**

*By Chris Latham (Perth branch)*

On February 6, Perth branch decided to stand in the Victoria Park by-election that will be held on March 11. The by-election was sparked by the shock resignation of WA premier Geoff Gallop on January 16.

## **The Victoria Park electorate**

The Victoria Park electorate is extremely diverse, ranging from the more affluent areas that approach the Swan River, to high density housing with large numbers of recent migrants and students from the nearby Curtin University. The electorate also includes light industrial areas in the suburbs of Welshpool and Carlisle.

## **The candidates**

The Socialist Alliance candidate is John Tattersall. John joined the Alliance in 2002, and has been involved in a wide range of campaigns in Perth. An issue that is particularly close to John's heart, as an AMWU delegate and a casual worker, is the plight of labour-hire workers, an issue that the election campaign will be focusing on.

The candidates for the mainstream parties that have been announced are:

ALP – Ben Wyatt, a lawyer with the Director of Public Prosecutions, and director of Indigenous Business Australia. Wyatt was supported in pre-selection by the right faction of the ALP.

Liberal – Bruce Stevenson, Victoria Park deputy mayor.

Greens – Former Greens senator and WA Legislative Council member Dee Margetts.

## **Socialist Alliance's campaign**

A central part of our election campaign will be to take up the issue of workers' rights particularly in light of the Work Choices legislation and how it will affect working people in the electorate. Part of the campaign will be to produce a petition calling on the state ALP government not to cooperate with the Howard government's new IR laws. We will also continue to collect signatures for the national petition calling on the ACTU to hold a national stoppage to oppose the Work Choices legislation. Through our focus on the IR campaign, the branch hopes to both appeal to and build links with people who have already come into contact with SA, but to also appeal to anyone who opposes Work Choices to not just vote for Socialist Alliance but get involved in the fight back against the Howard government.

In addition to the IR campaign, our campaign will be placing considerable emphasis on governments' assaults on civil liberties, particularly the role that the state ALP government has played in not only putting in place the enabling legislation for the federal legislation, but to pass even more draconian legislation, which has only been stopped by an alliance in the upper house between the Greens and the Liberals.

Our election material will emphasize both the impact of the terror laws on workers' rights, and the link with the war on Iraq. An important goal of our campaign will be to encourage as many people in the electorate as possible to attend the protest marking the third anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, which is being held on March 19 in Perth, eight days after the by-election.

Beyond these two key campaign priorities, we will look to highlight the Alliance's broader platform, such as opposition to the ongoing corporatisation and privatization of public infrastructure, particularly education, as well as opposition to uranium mining. The branch will address other issues that emerge in the campaign, by putting out media releases and establishing an election web-site where we can post SA's latest responses on issues.

While Perth branch will be looking to do both street stalls and door knocking throughout the electorate, we will also take on a number of additional initiatives. The first is to take advantage of the large number of Curtin University students who live in the Victoria Park electorate, by having a presence at the Curtin University both at orientation day, and in the weeks leading up to the by-election.

The second, at the suggestion of John Tattersall, is to do factory gate leafleting for the campaign, particularly those factories that we know have a high proportion of labour-hire workers, as a way in which to relate to workers who will be affected by Work Choices, but also profile SA as the campaigning, pro-working class alternative.

## **Goals of the campaign**

1. Gain new members, contacts and profile for SA
2. Use the petition to continue to develop SA's relationship with other forces in the IR campaign and to build the next stages in the campaign.
3. Use the campaign to build the anti-occupation of Iraq rally on March 18
4. Lay the foundations for ongoing work in Victoria Park.

# **Socialist Alliance to run in Port Adelaide**

*By Renfrey Clarke (Adelaide branch)*

As campaigning for the March 18 elections in South Australia gathers pace, state Labor treasurer Kevin Foley will be in for some unpleasant surprises.

While Labor candidates make general promises to improve the dismal state of South Australia's public hospitals, leaflets throughout Foley's electorate of Port Adelaide will point to the real, underlying cause of the health debacle.

Since being elected in 2002, the leaflets will explain, the government of Labor Premier Mike Rann has drastically cut state taxes on business – by a total over four years of no less than \$1 billion.

In Port Adelaide, the Socialist Alliance is running militant postal worker John McGill. “As a delegate to SA Unions,” the Socialist Alliance election material explains, “McGill is one of the people who are leading the fight in South Australia against the Howard government’s anti-union ‘Workchoices’ legislation.”

Rann’s government has had the sense to see that giving in to pressures to put state employees on individual contracts is a guaranteed vote-loser. Rann also points out that his government is backing the High Court challenge to Howard’s new industrial relations legislation. But the ALP’s veneer of opposition to ‘Workchoices’ hides what is effectively a do-nothing strategy.

How do Rann and Foley propose to fight back against Howard’s attacks on workers? The answer is tacit but [unmistakable](#): by getting Labor elected at the next federal election.

Contrast this with what McGill has to say: “Only militant, on-the-job organising and struggle can beat back Howard’s attacks.

“If elected, I’ll use the state parliament as a forum for publicising and defending workers’ struggles. And my office in Parliament House will be a base for organising the broad industrial campaigns needed to make the bosses back off.”

The Labor government will also come under sharp criticism from the Socialist Alliance on the issue of this summer’s scandalous power blackouts. The ALP’s stock answer here has been to blame the Liberal opposition, which while in office in 2001 leased the electricity infrastructure company ETSA to private interests. Socialist Alliance campaign materials will demand: revoke the lease! Return ETSA to public control!

The Socialist Alliance campaign in Port Adelaide will be officially launched at a fund-raising function in the electorate on February 25.

## **Hobart election campaign report**

*By Linda Seaborn (Hobart branch)*

The Tasmanian State government is due to call an election sometime between now and the end of the year. There is a lot of media speculation that it will be soon, and several Liberal and Labor candidates have started their campaign. The election has not been formally called though, so we don’t have a date to aim towards yet.

The Hobart Socialist Alliance ranch has decided to stand two candidates - Matt Holloway in the seat of Franklin and Linda Seaborn in Denison.

Our campaign priorities will be:

- Industrial Relations changes - the implications of over-riding state laws with federal
- Welfare to Work - challenging the state TCCI to come up with a job creation plan for sole parents and people with disabilities
- Civil Liberties - including the anti-terror laws, the call for a Bill of Human Rights, and prison reform (which is Matt’s particular area of experience)
- Environment
- Calling for the nationalisation of the Gunns timber company and Tasrail.

We are in the process of designing a campaign flyer. Matt spoke yesterday (as an SA candidate) at a New Matilda public forum about a national Bill of Human Rights.

## **Casual workers begin their own fightback**

*The following media statements were issued by members of the Gold Coast branch, to launch their United Casual Workers Alliance in February.*

A small group of casual and low-paid workers from the Gold Coast have begun to organise, in an effort to combat the attacks on workers’ rights throughout Australia.

The United Casual Workers Alliance has been inspired by the New Zealand based group Unite’s “Super Size My Pay” campaign, which saw thousands of casual workers stage industrial action against employers such as Starbucks.

“We felt that the Gold Coast was in a unique position, given the large numbers of casual workers who are employed in the tourist industry”, said UCWA organiser Amelia Taylor, who has worked in the tourism industry for the past 6 years.

“There are also many issues that are specific to casual workers. For example, some casual workers have more than one job, in different industries covered by different unions. Or they may require representation in regards to welfare services, as they rely on welfare to supplement their incomes”, added Ms Taylor, who is keen to point out that the organisation did not seek to “compete” with established unions: “We want to work with all existing unions, using the UCWA as a bridge for the more marginalised workers to get involved in the struggle.”

Fellow tourism worker and UCWA organiser Shane Carter also spelled out the benefits of the organisation yesterday: “Many of the issues faced by casual workers are the same regardless of the industry. The struggle to gain regular work, fair rest and leisure time and decent pay and conditions is common amongst all casual workers.”

The UCWA has issued a statement, which includes the following call to arms for the Australian public:

"We can no longer ignore the plight of casual workers, who are often the last people to seek representation. We need to create an environment that puts the rights of casual workers at the very top of the agenda - and lets these workers know that there is a way to have a united voice within the workplace."

The organisation hopes to recruit casual workers from the Gold Coast, and work with other organisations from around Australia to gain better working conditions for all casual workers."

For more information please contact the UCWA at: ucwa@mail.com or phone 0417 062 844. Mailing address: PO Box 432, Chirn Park Qld 4215.

## **United Casual Workers Alliance Community Meeting**

February 3, 2006

The United Casual Workers Alliance invites all workers, particularly casual and low-paid workers, labour movement representatives and interested members of the public to attend a meeting at 7:00PM on Monday the 13th of February at Fradgley Hall, Park Avenue, Burleigh Heads.

The formation committee of UCWA has received an overwhelming response to the recent Channel Nine news broadcast and interview regarding the plight of casual workers on the Gold Coast. At the meeting, UCWA organiser Ms Amelia Taylor will speak on the conditions experienced by casual workers and the aims of the alliance.

The charter of the UCWA will be read at the meeting and the floor will then be opened to all casual workers to speak about their own experiences in the workplace.

## **Global day of action on Iraq: Troops out!**

*By Pip Hinman, Co-convenor of Anti-war Committee*

Socialist Alliance members are making a concerted effort around the country to make this year's Iraq invasion anniversary protests from March 17-19 as big and broad as possible. Opinion polls in December showed a further increase in opposition to the Iraq war. There is a political opening now to bring in some of the pre-invasion anti-war folk – not just to the rallies but to take ownership of them by helping to build them. The anti-war groups are still far too narrow, and the new political openings allow us an opportunity to broaden them out, thereby guaranteeing a bigger turnout at the protests and the steady building of the movement

The oil-for-food scandal has forced the Howard government into damage control; its efforts to blame the Australian Wheat Board executives for undertaking illegal kickbacks without its knowledge make the government look even more shonky. For many the Cole inquiry underscores the hypocrisy and double standards of the Howard government's policy on Iraq and relations with Saddam Hussein.

Meanwhile, the US manoeuvres against Iran and its stance towards the democratically elected Palestinian government of Hamas is sounding alarm bells about another US-led invasion in the Middle East. In addition, the federal and state governments' new "anti-terror" laws which not only scapegoat people of Arabic decent but seriously threaten freedom of speech have caused widespread alarm, and anger.

The Howard government had hinted it may bring some of the troops home when the Al-Muthanna deployment in southern Iraq ends in May. But more recently foreign minister Alexander Downer is canvassing the idea that the troops may stay on after the Japanese engineers, whom the Australian troops are protecting, are withdrawn. For domestic political reasons the government would no doubt be keen for those troops to be given another low-risk mission.

## **Blair and Rice visits**

The national security committee of the federal cabinet is expected to canvass the options later in February, and no doubt the visits in March by Condoleezza Rice and Tony Blair will back the Howard government's decision, whatever it ends up being Labor's call for a staged withdrawal, a time-table for the troops to leave Iraq and be sent to Afghanistan – "terrorism central" as Kim Beazley puts it – adds some extra pressure, but not enough to force the Howard government to change their policy. Labor, echoed by Greens leader Bob Brown, have issued nationalist calls for the troops to be sent home protect Australia's interests here and the south east Asian region. The Liberal-National government and the Labor opposition may be more wary now of being seen to be just doing the bidding of the US, but both are still committed to the US-led "war on terrorism".

The Canberra ACTNOW anti-war group is preparing a "welcome" for Blair (and possibly Rice) at Parliament House in March and are asking anti-war groups for sponsorship (email: ACT\_NOW\_Canberra@yahoo.com.au). Anti-war and civil rights groups are doing the same for the two warmongers when they visit Melbourne for the Stolenwealth Games in mid-March.

Anti-war groups in cities that cannot go to Canberra are discussing solidarity protests in their cities.

The central demand of the anti-war protests is "Troops out of Iraq". Some coalitions are also calling for an end to state harassment of Muslims and for a defence of civil liberties. The March 17-19 protests should become the primary civil liberties protests in March.

In the lead-up to the global day of action Socialist Alliance members should discuss whether they can instigate either on its own or with others, some sort of protest around the oil-for-food scandal. Is there a chance for a picket of any senior ministers (ie Downer's office in Adelaide, or the Cole inquiry (being held in Sydney)?)

SA members in Marrickville peace group are working on a campaign to raise awareness about Iraq in. The 20-03 campaign seeks to organise various groups and individuals in a 20-day vigil outside the US consulate in central Sydney leading up to March 20 with the intention of raising awareness about the war and recruiting new activists to the

movement. Its origin comes from the way the numbers repeat in the date that news of the invasion of Iraq first reached Australia (20:03:2003). The idea has sparked interest with various other groups and is gaining momentum (see: <http://members.optusnet.com.au/~gtw/2003website/index2.htm>).

## **Joining forces**

Sydney Stop the War and Sydney Peace and Justice Coalitions are now jointly organising the March 18 rally – the first time the two coalitions have worked together since the peace movement split in 2003. This break-through should boost confidence and draw activists back into the movement. The Sydney rally themes are: Three years of occupation – 100,000 plus dead. Troops out of Iraq, Peace and Justice for the Iraqi people. Each coalition will coordinate its own leaflet, but a joint poster has been devised, and the costs shared. We have agreed to have five speakers: a unionist, a Uniting Church minister, a speaker from the Middle East, Kerry Nettle from the Greens and a student. Each coalition will provide an MC for the rally.

In Brisbane, while the initiative was taken by the Stop the War Coalition, Rally for Peace and Peace Convergence have decided to come on board. Terry Hicks, father of Guantanamo Bay prisoner David Hicks, has agreed to speak at the rally, as well as Grace Grace from the Qld Council of Unions, a Greens' spokesperson, a Muslim community speaker and SA national executive member Sam Watson (unless he is in Melbourne for the Stolenwealth Games).

Socialist Alliance unionists are keen to raise support motions in their union, and a model motion will be put onto the SA website shortly.

Campus O-weeks also provide a great opportunity to get the message out and draw more people into the organization of the day. Organising big campus contingents is very achievable if some work is put in now.

Similarly, on high schools and TAFES, where there has been strong feeling against the war, SA members should work out a plan to reactivate the networks that have been active.

With a short time to go, and a general willingness of many in the peace movement to work together, we should be creative in working out how to make this anniversary protest big. If we can build a movement strong enough to force the Howard government to withdraw the Australian troops, we will hasten the end of the occupation of Iraq.

## **A case of state-sponsored racism**

### **Stop the attacks on the Muslim and Arab communities!**

*A statement issued by the Socialist Alliance National Executive on December 15, 2005*

The events in Cronulla and their aftermath are chickens-come-home-to-roost for the racist Howard government, and all its partners in "Hansonism".

The riots reflect the rising racism in Australia, a tide that has been fostered by the Howard government's policies and propaganda that criminalise and lock up refugees, dehumanise and bomb the Iraqi people, and define all Muslims and Middle-Eastern Australians as potential terrorists.

So when the new terrorism bill is promulgated - aided and abetted so keenly by the Labor Party - is it so strange that on a NSW beach such racism explodes?

This country's entrenched racism, historically focused on Aborigines and Asians, has been exploited once again, like a maggot which has been given fresh garbage. The prejudice on which Pauline Hanson relied has now jumped the generations - from the ex-diggers and grey-haired RSL loyalists, to the marijuana and beer-fuelled youths who are hurting in Howard's Australia, in and out of work.

While this process has taken its time, it needed official state sponsorship, enshrined in such things as the new anti-terrorism legislation, to find a new core of activists.

And our prime minister, John Howard, wants to preach calm! Has anyone seen these guys? Should any ethnic community be calm when these thugs are whacked out of their heads, wielding baseball bats and launching bricks and flower pots!

And they wrap themselves up in the flag of the Australian state to justify themselves! Are these then, the "real Australians" of which the prime minister is so keen to eulogize?

In the face of this terror, communities are being asked to rely on the NSW police force for protection. But who would do such a thing?

Emboldened by the reactionary federal government, the NSW Labor Party has worked overtime to divide the state along ethnic lines, with the determined complicity of the radio shock jocks and the print media. By engineering a brutal police regime in multi-ethnic communities at the same time as Muslims are being blamed for so much - from a genetic predisposition to pack rape to a war of terror – it's no surprise that these riots occur in New South Wales given what the ALP government has dealt out these last few years.

Those young Lebanese-Australians were right when they gathered to protect their local mosque. They are right to demand an end to the racist scapegoating of their communities. And the trade union movement, anti-war activists and everyone outraged by racism must stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

Stop the racist attacks! Defend civil liberties! Repeal the anti-terror laws!

## **Labor and Coalition must act for West Papua**

*Socialist Alliance Media release issued on January 26, 2006*

Socialist Alliance spokesperson Pip Hinman today called on the federal Coalition government and the ALP opposition to “learn the lesson of East Timor” in relation to West Papua. “Last week’s arrival on Cape York of 43 West Papua asylum seekers and the shooting of a young protester should set alarm bells ringing in the ALP”, Hinman said. “Will the people of West Papua have to endure as bloody and painful a struggle as the East Timorese before Labor drops the pro-Jakarta policy on West Papua it now shares with the Howard government?”

The Socialist Alliance challenges federal Labor to distinguish itself from the inhumane and racist refugee policy of the Howard government and to begin to engage positively with the West Papuan people’s struggles for self-determination. Hinman noted that the signs from the ALP were unpromising. “Instead of standing up for the rights of the West Papuans the federal opposition Labor, through shadow minister for Overseas Aid and Pacific Island Affairs Bob Sercombe, is simply calling for a joint parliamentary fact-finding trip to West Papua by Indonesian and Australian parliamentarians.”

“What facts does Labor have to find?”, Hinman asked. “The Indonesia army and elite have oppressed the people of West Papua just as much as they did the people of East Timor. If shadow minister Sercombe really lacks facts he could start by reading Dutch historian Dr Peter Drooglever’s 2005 report to the Dutch parliament on the incorporation of West Papua into Indonesia.” This report found that:

1. The 1969 ‘Act of Free Choice’, in which 1022 Papuans out of a population of 800,000 were press-ganged into voting for incorporation into Indonesia, was a total sham.

2. Indonesian police and army presence in West Papua has steadily increased since 1969, in direct contradiction to the proposal of former Indonesian foreign minister Adam Malik, who stated that “the army would first have to be withdrawn before Papuan society would be able to develop.”

3. West Papua’s abundant natural resources have been ruthlessly exploited for the benefit of the military and the Jakarta elite, leaving the Papuans as one of the poorest communities in the Indonesian archipelago.

4. Over the decades since 1969 “not a day went by ... when no one died or no one was seriously mistreated.” Casualty figures “running into the tens of thousands have been mentioned”.

Hinman called on the 43 West Papuan asylum seekers to be flown to the mainland from Christmas Island, released into the community and granted permanent refugee status. She added: “On no account should they be returned to West Papua — it’s not difficult to imagine what their fate would be at the hands of an Indonesia military that only a fortnight ago deported eight independence fighters from West Papua to Jakarta against their will.”

The Socialist Alliance is fully committed to building the protest movement in support of the asylum-seekers and in solidarity with West Papua’s struggle for self-determination. Part of that campaign must be to end all Australian aid to the Indonesian military.

“We support the formation of the largest possible coalition of political, human rights, church and community groups to put pressure on the government to allow the refugees to stay and on the government and the ALP to change their bipartisan line of complicity with Jakarta’s policies of repression in West Papua”, Hinman said. “The Australian solidarity movement with East Timor was critical in forcing Canberra to change its line of collaboration with Jakarta against the rights of the Timorese. We can and must repeat that effort for the people of West Papua.”

## **Surveying the branches**

*Following an initial discussion on the state of the SA membership, branches and other bodies, the January 29 meeting of the National Executive unanimously agreed that:*

- “1. Surveys to collect more accurate information about the state of the membership, and branch and state activities be sent to all branches and state committees next week with a request that the information be provided to the NE in time for the next NE meeting, so that a more comprehensive discussion can be had”: and

- “2. The next NE meeting discussion of the branch reports also discuss SA’s main campaign foci for the next period.”

## **Filling vacancies on the National Executive**

*Following the resignation from the National Executive of Alex Miller (who has left Australia to take a job in the UK) and detailed discussion among NE members about if and how the vacancy should be filled (SA’s current Constitution is silent on these questions), the January 29 NE meeting unanimously passed the following motions:*

- “1. That the vacancy on the NE left by Alex Miller’s resignation when he left Australia be filled as soon as possible.”

- “2. That the position be offered to the comrade who received the highest vote in the NE election at the 2005 national conference but was not elected, on the condition that his/her position on the NE complies with the constitutional requirement for a 40% limit on the members of any one affiliate elected to the NE from the national conference. If that person is unable to fill the NE position, that it be offered to the comrade who received the next highest vote but was not elected, and so on.”

The comrades who stood for but were not elected to the NE at the national conference, in order of the votes they received, are: Andrew Watson (Northern Rivers branch), Amelia Taylor (Gold Coast), Alison Maxwell (Sydney West), Humphrey McQueen (Canberra), Julie Sloggett (Bankstown), Raul Bassi (Bankstown), Rene Aragon (Hobart).

## **Trade union fight-back campaign**

*Following discussion around a progress report on the petition to the ACTU calling for mass protests and a national stoppage in March, the January 29 National Executive meeting agreed that:*

- “1. SA branches and members be encouraged to make a last big push on getting signatures on the petition in the next week. Carried unanimously; and
2. The national Trade Union Committee meet as soon as possible after February 7 to assess the outcome of the ACTU meeting and formulate proposals on the next steps in the campaign for presentation to the next NE meeting.”

## **Alliance Voices protocols**

*Following discussion about serious concerns raised by NE members about some of the assertions contained in Mark Lockett’s article submitted to Alliance Voices, the January 29 meeting of the National Executive unanimously agreed that:*

“All individuals and organisations named in Mark’s article have the right of reply in the same issue of Alliance Voices”.

*Given the submission to Alliance Voices by Michael Schembri of his letter of resignation, the NE agreed unanimously that:*

“It is not the practice of the Socialist Alliance to publish letters of resignation from the SA in Alliance Voices, which is a discussion bulletin for current members. However, in the interests of open discussion about the development of SA, this NE meeting agrees to publish Michael Schembri’s letter despite him no longer being a member.”

## **Fightback Manifesto**

*The January 29 National Executive meeting agreed unanimously that:*

“Dick Nichols be authorised to organise the drafting and production of a ‘Fightback Manifesto’ to assist SA members in presenting the Alliance’s policies and proposals for action in the campaigns against the neo-liberal attacks on working people, and to recruit to SA. That Dick report to the NE on the draft of such a manifesto as soon as possible.”

## **National conferences in 2006**

*The January 29 National Executive meeting unanimously agreed that:*

- “1. SA’s national Trade Union Committee investigate possibilities for a second National Trade Union Fightback Conference in 2006, by mid-year if possible.
2. If such a public fight-back conference is initiated, that SA plan its 2006 national decision-making conference to be held back-to-back with the fightback conference.
3. SA aim to hold its national decision-making conference around mid-year (June-July), unless a national public fightback conference is to be held at another time in the year to which we could reasonably attach the SA conference.

## **Not enough jobs? a response to Carl Kenner**

*By Chris Slee (Wills branch)*

In his article headed "Why I am not the same class as an Indonesian worker" (*Alliance Voices*, vol 5, no 10) Carl Kenner says: "Jobs are a resource that is in short supply. There are not enough jobs for everyone, because nobody has organised 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".

Is it true that there are "not enough jobs for everyone"? Yes and no. It is true that the capitalist economic system does not create jobs for everyone. But that just shows that capitalism needs to be replaced by a system that can create jobs for all who want them.

Under the capitalist system, corporations try to maximise profit by driving their employees to work as long and as hard as possible, while leaving a lot of other people unemployed. Under socialism, where profit is not the main goal of production, the opportunity to work will be offered to all who wish to do so. This might entail reducing the working hours of many of the existing workers.

In a socialist world the problem of unemployment would be easily solved. But of course we are not living in a socialist world, but rather in a world dominated by the capitalist economic system - and furthermore a world that is

divided into nation states that are highly unequal in many ways, including in their degree of industrialisation and the average wages of their workers.

Wage inequality between workers in different nations provides an incentive for capitalists to transfer the production of certain goods, or certain parts of the production process, from countries where wages are relatively high to those where wages are lower. (This does not mean that every kind of production will be transferred to where wages are lowest. There are a lot of other factors capitalists take into account, e.g. proximity to markets, quality of infrastructure, availability of workers with specialised skills, etc).

Comrade Kenner suggests that we should welcome the process of transferring production to countries with lower wages, because it brings jobs to people in third world countries who need them more than people in advanced capitalist countries such as Australia.

I agree that the establishment of modern industries in third world countries is potentially a very good thing. It can provide jobs for some people who were previously unemployed, and higher pay for workers who previously worked in agriculture or other traditional jobs.

In practice, however, the working conditions in the new factories are often extremely harsh, the hours very long, the pay insufficient for a decent life, etc. Often the workers in the new factories are not allowed to join or form unions. One of the goals of transnational corporations in transferring production from one country to another may be to replace a unionised workforce by a non-unionised one.

Third world workers need to organise and fight for their rights, as many are in fact doing. Workers in countries such as the Philippines and South Korea have waged some very militant struggles. Unions in advanced capitalist countries such as Australia should do what they can to help them.

International solidarity work is very important, both in giving concrete assistance to workers overseas, and in raising the political consciousness of Australian workers.

But the transfer of production from one country to another creates particular problems for unions. It creates an apparent contradiction between the interests of workers in one country, who are losing jobs, and those in another country, who are gaining jobs. We need to find ways of defending the interests of workers both in Australia and overseas.

If we reject comrade Kenner's premise that jobs are "a resource that is in short supply", then we do not have to accept that the creation of more jobs in the third world necessarily means less jobs in advanced capitalist countries such as Australia. We want to create more jobs both in Australia and in the third world, to meet the needs of the people of both Australia and the third world.

Applying this principle in practice is very difficult, given that the capitalists who own the means of production make the key decisions, not the workers of either Australia or the third world.

In a socialist world, workers in Australia would offer assistance to workers in countries such as China and Indonesia to build factories to produce goods for use by the people of those countries, without fearing that this would cause Australian workers to lose their jobs.

But what should Australian unions do today when transnational corporations threaten to close a factory in Australia and transfer production to Indonesia or China?

Often in such a situation the unions, while denouncing the company's decision, in practice do not seriously challenge it, but merely fight for a better redundancy package than what the company is offering. There have been some quite militant struggles around this issue, involving protracted picket lines, which have been successful in winning a better redundancy deal.

Socialist Alliance should support any such struggle. But we should also encourage unions to defend jobs, not just not seek a better redundancy package.

In my previous article ("Relative privilege, protectionism and immigration controls", Alliance Voices, vol 5, no 9) I offered a few suggestions on how unions should deal with these problems, including: developing links with unions in the third world; campaigning for common minimum standards of pay, conditions and union rights for workers in different countries; demanding information about the company's plans, including the proposed pay and conditions of workers in the overseas country to which production is planned to be transferred; demanding a guarantee of new jobs of a kind acceptable to the threatened workers, and retraining for those jobs; and demanding the nationalisation of companies that threaten to sack workers.

These suggestions by no means constitute a total solution. Indeed there can be no comprehensive solution short of socialism.

## **Letter to the Socialist Alliance from the Democratic Socialist Perspective**

January 16, 2006

Dear comrades,

I am writing to you to inform the Socialist Alliance of decisions taken by the Democratic Socialist Perspective at its 22nd Congress on January 5-8, 2006, which included a detailed discussion of the DSP's relation to and work in the Socialist Alliance.

These deliberations took place after an extensive pre-congress discussion centred on the draft resolution, "The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance", which was published in the Socialist Alliance's discussion bulletin, Alliance Voices, in December (Volume 5, Number 11).

The draft resolution was adopted by the congress, with one amendment that underlines the DSP's commitment to continue to build the Socialist Alliance as a new party project. The adopted version is attached to this letter.

As you know, the DSP debate took place between majority and minority platforms of the outgoing DSP National Executive. While both platforms supported the draft congress resolution, the NE minority proposed that the DSP return to calling itself the Democratic Socialist Party, a course opposed by the NE majority. The NE majority position received the support of three quarters of the Congress delegates.

Congress also elected a new DSP National Committee, which in turn established the national officeholder positions of National Secretary, Assistant National Secretary and National President. Comrades Peter Boyle, Sue Bolton and John Percy were respectively elected to these positions.

More detailed proposals adopted by Congress committed DSP members to work within Socialist Alliance structures (and in broader formations if and when they arise) to advance the organisation and fighting capacity of the trade union movement, and to build to the best of our ability campaigns in defence of civil liberties, against racism and imperialist war, for students' ability to organise politically, and against the government's assaults on welfare provision and other democratic and social rights.

Congress assessed that the Socialist Alliance is well placed to advance these campaigns and that continuing to champion left unity through Socialist Alliance and beyond is vital to improving the chances of turning the tide in favour of the working class and building a strong anti-capitalist movement in Australia.

Congress also discussed how to make more progress in implementing the decisions of the Socialist Alliance's June 2005 National Conference. Proposals adopted for discussion by Socialist Alliance included:

- Joining more people to Socialist Alliance (Congress assessed that there is a lot of potential to do this in the current political conditions);
- Organising to broaden and deepen the participation of Socialist Alliance members, especially unaffiliated members, in every sphere and at every level of the Alliance, including its leadership bodies, through inclusive and democratic branch meetings, caucuses, committees and e-lists;
- Further streamlining the administrative work associated with Socialist Alliance's electoral registration so that more membership energy can be devoted to political discussion and campaigning; and
- Further strengthening the Socialist Alliance-building role of Green Left Weekly.

Congress also agreed to make some specific proposals to the Socialist Alliance National Executive that the DSP thinks can strengthen the Alliance's capacity to build resistance to the neo-liberal attacks. These included:

- Producing, as soon as possible, a Socialist Alliance Fightback Manifesto that sets out its views on the capitalists' offensive, the type of action that can stop them, the need for a political alternative and how people can get involved in the struggle. As we embark on a year of what could be make or break struggles against the government's and bosses' wide-ranging attacks, such a manifesto will be invaluable for building both Socialist Alliance and the fightback.
- Initiating a discussion in the broader union movement about possibilities for a second National Trade Union Fight-back Conference mid-year and scheduling the 2006 SA national conference to coincide with such a broader conference, as in 2005.

The DSP looks forward to a year of growing resistance to the capitalists' neo-liberal offensive and to helping to build the Socialist Alliance as an invaluable player in that fight. We are confident that the impressive left unity and movement leadership so far shown by the Socialist Alliance will make a real contribution to shifting the balance of class forces in favour of working people and the oppressed.

If the Socialist Alliance National Executive would like to discuss the results of the 22nd DSP Congress in more detail, I would be pleased to have it listed as an agenda item at the next Socialist Alliance NE meeting.

We request that this letter be published in Alliance Voices for the information of Socialist Alliance members and supporters.

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## **The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance**

*[The following resolution was adopted by the DSP's Congress in Sydney, January 5-8, 2006.]*

### **Introduction**

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

2. The resolution "The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance" set the DSP on a course of building the Socialist Alliance, progressing its transformation into a united, multi-tendency socialist party and integrating as much of the resources of the Democratic Socialist Party into the Socialist Alliance as possible. However, despite our best efforts, over the past two years we have not been able to build the Socialist Alliance into an effective

new party and our attempt to integrate as much of the resources of the DSP into the Socialist Alliance as possible has stalled. While the smaller affiliates have remained opposed to, obstructed, or abstained from most collective political activity in the Socialist Alliance, too few leaders and activists have so far emerged from the majority of Socialist Alliance members who are not in any affiliate group. Whilst acknowledging the early stage of development of the Socialist Alliance, this resolution reaffirms the DSP's commitment to building the Socialist Alliance as a new party project.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8. The main reason for the Socialist Alliance's poor votes is the electoral rise of the Greens, who now capture most of the broad left vote including that of many progressive people who respect the work of the Socialist Alliance. However, as elected Greens candidates at various levels of government are politically tested, the space for candidates to the left of the Greens will open up - as was demonstrated by the election of Socialist Party member Steve Jolly to the Yarra Council. The Green party is unclear about whether its aims can be achieved under capitalism or not. This leads the Greens to underestimate the importance of independent working-class mobilisation and organisation in favour of parliamentary activities. While there are some socialists and other grass-roots activists within the Greens, there is a rightward pressure exerted on the party by its wealthier supporters and by its parliamentary focus. Moreover, the Greens generally remain weak in many working class communities and electorates where anger and disillusionment with the ALP potentially provides the support base for a new workers' party. As the Greens' political limitations become clearer, the Socialist Alliance can convince left-wing Greens activists to join a working-class party with an effective strategy for social change and ecological sustainability. In this framework, the DSP remains committed to close collaboration between the Socialist Alliance and the Greens in community, social, environment and electoral campaigns.

9. While over the past two years there have been some setbacks for the militant trade union current (e.g. the deposing and jailing of militant former AMWU Victorian secretary Craig Johnston, a prominent Socialist Alliance member), that militant minority continues to exercise considerable influence in Victoria and has made gains in other states. The Socialist Alliance has gradually advanced the organisation of its members and supporters in the trade unions and has built campaigns around the demands of its action platform. Its united campaigning, while limited (notably the other affiliate groups are not very active in the trade union or other caucuses), continues to be more effective than the individual efforts of any single socialist group. In several cities, Socialist Alliance members are respected leaders of the militant trade union minority, enjoying the support of thousands of militant workers. The election of Socialist Alliance members Chris Cain as WA secretary of the Maritime Union of Australia, Tim Gooden as secretary of the Geelong Trades Hall Council, Chris Spindler as president of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the successful June 2005 National Trade Union Fightback Conference are a few examples of these gains.

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

11. The Socialist Alliance is more widely identified by workers as the political pole of recent militant initiatives on the trade union movement and more militant workers are now joining the Socialist Alliance, though still at a modest

rate. On the back of Fightback's success, the fourth Socialist Alliance national conference elected a more democratic national executive that includes prominent trade union and social movement leaders such as Craig Johnston, Sam Watson and Tim Gooden. The challenge is to try to develop this into an effective leadership.

12. These two conferences set a challenge for the Socialist Alliance to play a serious role in helping lead the mass working-class resistance to the Howard government's new anti-union laws. The 350,000 workers who mobilised on June 30/July 1, put the Howard government on the defensive. The June 30-July 1 trade union demonstrations were the largest mass mobilisations seen since February 2003. In the intervening two and half years, the biggest demonstration (apart from the 10-15,000 strong forest rally in Hobart in March 2004 and the 10,000-strong Save the Tasmanian Forests march in Melbourne in June 2004) in any single city was about 5,000-strong. The June 30-July 1 demonstrations were preceded by delegates meetings in some states which indicated a new willingness to fight in the trade union movement's ranks. Activists in other social movements began to understand the strategic need to defend the trade union movement - the last remaining social movement in his country with any ongoing mass organisation.

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

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

15. Having led the working class into retreat and having championed the neoliberal offensive against the social gains of previous working class struggles, the ALP has been facing a serious political crisis. Labor's ever more explicit shift to the right - whether in government or in opposition - has opened up a space to its left that all serious socialists know we have to contend for. The replacement of Mark Latham by Kim Beazley destroyed the brief illusions sparked by Latham's populist rhetoric and call for the withdrawal of Australian troops from Iraq by Christmas 2004. Over time Labor's shift to the right has created a deep structural crisis for the ALP<197>its activist base has been shrinking, aging and becoming more inactive, as dramatically exposed in former leader Latham's memoirs. A growing section of the working class and other oppressed and victimised sections of society has continued to look for a political alternative to the major parties. At the same time, the viciousness of the Howard government's attack is leading some unionists who don't trust the Labor Party and oppose the Labor Party's reactionary support for mandatory detention of refugees and the "anti-terrorism" legislation" to join the ALP despite these bi-partisan positions. Labor's focus on opposition to the Howard WorkChoices legislation - even as it supports the Howard government's "anti-terrorism" laws - is aimed at reconsolidating its support base.

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

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

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

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

closely with a wider layer of working-class militants in the current political conditions. Socialists will continue to win more of the respect and confidence of these working class leaders and militants if we continue to struggle for a united socialist party.

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

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

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

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

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

24. In the meantime, the DSP has to continue to take urgent steps to replenish its cadre base and maintain the political, organisational and financial viability of its own structures. Socialist Alliance structures remain too loose and weak to win, educate and train new socialist activists and the Socialist Alliance caucuses and working groups have only partially begun to organise united interventions into the movements. We need to recruit to the DSP from within and outside the Socialist Alliance and, primarily through Resistance, win, educate and develop a new generation of revolutionary youth cadre.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- That program can only be developed and effectively applied by a party which - through its consistent political activity - can win a leadership or vanguard role in the working class;
- That party must be comprised of activists who carry out such a program and who agree with and are capable of working collectively (i.e. in a disciplined way) to advance it; and
- That party must have an internationalist perspective, understanding the role of imperialism and be firm in its goal of overthrowing its own ruling class.

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

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

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

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

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

- To build the Socialist Alliance as a campaigning alliance in the social movements (particularly the trade union movement) that seeks to build, in actions and in words, a new mass workers' party because the greater political unity, confidence and active commitment required to advance this new party project will be forged through such collective struggle;
- To promote internationalism and comradely collaboration between the Socialist Alliance and socialist organisations in other countries on the basis of solidarity and mutual non-interference;
- To win other Socialist Alliance members to revolutionary socialism; and
- To provide revolutionary socialist political leadership within the Socialist Alliance.

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

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

## **The DSP and the Socialist Alliance: the challenge for the Left**

### *A statement from the ISO National Executive*

The Democratic Socialist Perspective has had a sharp internal debate about the Socialist Alliance. This has happened after a poor year for the SA, which has degenerated, with few branches active, membership declining and rundown morale.

This document is an attempt to analyse events, draw out possible lessons, and counter some of the sectarian conclusions that could be drawn from the situation.

That the DSP itself is divided over the question of the Alliance should not be viewed as a justification for condemning the whole project from the start, but should provide a chance to make an assessment.

### **The challenges facing the Australian Left**

The declining state of the SA has occurred during a challenging yet dynamic situation in Australian politics.

The Liberals' fourth straight election victory courtesy of the Labor opposition led to widespread pessimism and demoralisation.

Yet this started to turn around very quickly over the past six months, as the series of attacks mounted by the Liberals quickly led to opposition and resistance over privatisation, civil liberties, industrial relations and racism towards Muslims.

Most significantly, the November 15 union mobilisations were the biggest protests since the 2003 Iraq demonstrations. The size and confidence of those demonstrations represented a massive rejection of neo-liberal policies and a significant shift to the left in Australian politics. As a result, Howard's popularity has fallen to the lowest level in opinion polls since before Tampa.

At the same time, confidence in Labor remains low, with Beazley mimicking the government's terrorism policies and providing little inspiration over the industrial relations laws or privatisation.

While the Greens achieved an impressive result at the last election, they have been disappointing since then. Their parliamentary outlook has meant an inability to take a lead over the many possible sites of resistance to Howard's offensive. They have proved incapable of turning electoral support into a stronger movement.

While the SA performed badly at the last federal election, there is an audience questioning mainstream politics and looking to resist. How to cohere and give a lead to that opposition is the question facing the Left.

The SA itself was born out of an early attempt by the far Left to meet this challenge. The rise of an anti-capitalist movement since Seattle, the international realignment of the Left that it sparked, and the deepening crisis of social democracy were the stimuli that led the DSP and ISO to initiate the Socialist Alliance project in 2001.

Like the ISO, the DSP recognised the rise of the anti-capitalist movement after S11, 2000 and M1 in 2001. It recognised the importance of the Left providing a pole of attraction to those breaking to the left from Labor, and the international trend of regroupment in a number of countries.

While there have been new opportunities, there have been serious objective difficulties, too. We expected to face a rightwing Labor federal government, but found ourselves with a re-elected Howard government. Also, SA found its potential electoral space squeezed by the rise of the Greens.

These objective difficulties in the electoral sphere cannot alone explain the decline of the SA. For the party to be in worse shape than ever, particularly bad political decisions were required.

## **Sectarian mistakes**

It is also a mistake to argue, as some of the revolutionary left do, that these (new Left) formations should convert themselves into "parties" based on the traditional model of far left organisation – with their own papers, unitary membership rather than the quasi-federal structure adopted by Respect, etc.

*Underlying these demands is the idea that what the new parties are about is regrouping the existing far left rather than acting as the focus of a much larger political realignment that draws in new forces. This may help to explain why the main organisation to have adopted the far left model – the Scottish Socialist Party – has undergone a deep crisis over the past year. – SWP (Britain), in International Socialist Tendency discussion bulletin #7, January 2006 (www.istendency.net)*

There was a tension from the beginning between the DSP and ISO over our visions for the Socialist Alliance. The DSP saw the project as based on the SSP model, where the distinction between a broad party and a revolutionary party was fudged. At the same time, the DSP argued that the SA was about regrouping the revolutionary Left.

The ISO conceived of the SA as a pluralist, loose formation of both revolutionaries and reformists, with a significant focus on electoral work – a united front.

Attitudes to the ALP and how to conduct campaign work led to discussion, which while sometimes tedious, was at least grounded in working through joint ways of responding to political developments.

The first year or so of the SA was marked by goodwill, a willingness to compromise and a healthy sense of bringing down barriers on the Left.

Unfortunately the DSP broke with this approach, making a number of decisions that imposed its politics on the whole of the SA and thus debilitated many members and affiliates. Four decisions were particularly disastrous.

- Using the DSP's majority to select or isolate various non-aligned members within the leadership.
- Declaring the SA a multi-tendency socialist party.
- Insisting that *Green Left Weekly* be the "paper of the Socialist Alliance".
- Taking 100 per cent of membership fees from local branches, effectively crippling local work.

Having rammed through these measures in a divisive manner, the DSP tried to blame the ISO and others for the subsequent malaise of the Alliance. This may have temporarily cohered the DSP membership, but such a sectarian internal mobilisation could hardly conceal the failure of the DSP's perspective. The DSP, after all, got everything it wanted.

To understand the motivation for the DSP's crash through or crash approach we need to look at its particular model of a multi-tendency socialist party.

## **The politics at the centre of the DSP debate**

The DSP's perspective for the Socialist Alliance was very contradictory. Its MTSP model was based on a model of revolutionary regroupment, but one that blurred the distinction between a broad party and a revolutionary group.

The DSP might have recognised the political shift in the general situation after Seattle, but it continued to use its long-established organising methods.

The result was that its members brought to the SA a pace of activity suited to a revolutionary organisation – long, weekly meetings with extensive agendas focused around a high level of regular activism.

Yet the levels of activism, theoretical cohesion and discipline within the Socialist Alliance could never mirror that of a revolutionary group. To do so would have made it uninhabitable for non-revolutionaries.

Recognising the difference between a broad party and a revolutionary party is not sectarianism, but reflects the different roles that each can play.

A broad party can be active around a minimum platform, particular activities, and need not demand a high level of ideological cohesion.

Issues of theory or areas of disagreement can exist without becoming points of endless argument. It allows for broadness and unity in action without deriding the importance of theory.

The DSP's fudge led to the exact opposite.

While professing to be for a broad organisation, it also insisted on imposing many organisational measures that mirrored the DSP's own image such as Marxist educational meetings, films, caucuses and *Green Left* stalls.

All of these decisions flowed from the DSP's political perspectives. Their members thought that the Socialist Alliance could be built in the same way that the DSP had built itself – through *Green Left* sales, passive propaganda routines and an abstract vision of socialism.

The DSP changed from a "party" to a "perspective" within the Socialist Alliance. For its comrades, building the SA and building the DSP were the same. This unclear stance also created a tension between the DSP and those less active, hence the moralism often expressed by the DSP about the organisational workloads carried by its comrades.

Despite words to the contrary, the DSP's position meant a narrower, DSP-dominated Alliance without the theoretical or organisational cohesion of a revolutionary Marxist organisation.

This theoretical contradiction in the DSP's view underpins the split within their leadership.

Contrary to some analyses, it is not simply a result of personality tensions or the organisational methods of the DSP (even though these can obviously exacerbate problems). The majority are for continuing the current DSP perspective of building the SA as its public face, whereas the minority are for returning to a DSP-centred perspective, changing the name of DSP from "Perspective" back to "Party", and treating the SA as an electoral front.

Unfortunately both sides agree theoretically on the question of revolutionary regroupment and have a very sectarian attitude towards the rest of the Left. While the minority talk of building united fronts, this is understood practically as DSP fronts around international solidarity work and resistance.

Neither side has made an honest assessment of the approach that the DSP forced on to the Socialist Alliance, where it marginalised affiliate groups and the majority of active non-aligned SA members.

The actual activity proposed by both sides is very similar – a routine of *Green Left* distribution, Marxist education, and meetings about Venezuela, and so on. The question that seems to be avoided is how the Socialist Alliance should have been different to the revolutionary groups that set it up.

Rather than a vision of the Socialist Alliance that was bigger than any one affiliate, the DSP cemented its dominance and marginalised those with different conceptions. Naturally, because the Alliance was a loose formation with many different viewpoints, those that disagreed with the DSP left or become less active.

Neither side seems to have a way forward for the Alliance or the DSP that is different to the measures used in the past.

## **Where to now?**

The DSP course is not likely to change or lead to a revived Socialist Alliance. The ISO takes no joy in the current situation. Indeed, the difficulties facing the SA and the negative experience in dealing with the DSP will be delightful to cynics and sectarians.

Many inside the SA are resigning or quietly dropping out. The ISO made an assessment after the June SA conference that the DSP perspective would stifle the SA and that our energies would be better spent building the anti-war movement.

The question is often asked why we did not leave if we didn't think we could work within the DSP's framework. Unfortunately the situation is a difficult one. While the SA has proven limited in becoming the broad Left alternative to the ALP, neither is there the possibility of an immediate, better alternative elsewhere.

Some on the Left look to the Greens. This is not an option for the ISO. While we have welcomed the rise of the Greens electorally as an expression of anti-capitalist sentiment, the Greens remain limited to electoral politics and lethargic towards the working class. While we want to relate to the Greens, joining them would have been impossible unless we liquidated our paper and organisation.

Neither was a Respect-style coalition appropriate given the absence of a mass anti-war movement in Australia, a left Labor breakaway like Galloway or significant connections to the Muslim community.

Hence we have a difficult situation where there is a need and space for a broad Left pole of attraction, but unfortunately the Left is incapable of delivering it at present.

Exiting the SA after the 2005 national conference might have been clean and clear, but it would only have nourished the idea that the Left could not work together. It would have closed the door to future possible developments and

possibilities for electoral work or other joint Left activity with the DSP. Rather than agonising, the ISO had to look at how we could constructively build the Left.

Hence we reduced our involvement in SA, and avoided being drawn into the aggressive arguments being pursued by the DSP. Our approach was to reduce the damage caused by the decline of the SA and work to open up better possibilities by working with Greens, left Labor, Muslims and others in joint activity.

Given the centrality of Iraq and the war on terror, a group our size has decided to focus on building the anti-war movement.

Meanwhile, the situation is fluid and by all accounts the situation for the SA is deteriorating. The ISO will have to consider whether our affiliation has any meaning.

In these circumstances, the ISO has a general argument to make to the Left, those who were around the SA and any DSP comrades we work with.

The degeneration of the SA project was not inevitable. The objective and subjective circumstances existed in 2001 and continue to exist for a broad Left alternative.

However, to take advantage of this situation, the far Left needs to turn out from its own propaganda agendas and build the movements against war, Islamophobia, attacks on civil liberties and on our unions.

In short, we need to build the roots in networks of resistance that will open up better opportunities for Left political representation in the future.

## **Additional ideas on the Alliance**

*By Bernie Rosen (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)*

The factual account contained in the “Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance” Draft Resolution [published in *Alliance Voices*, Vol 5, No 11] for the DSP Congress sets out clearly and accurately the current situation.

The evidence available now indicates three factors that merit consideration. First, the distortion of socialism in the former USSR and the crimes committed by the Stalinists in the name of socialism.

Secondly, the political capital that the defenders of the capitalist ruling class have extracted from the former USSR and China, depicting socialism in the most unfavourable light.

Thirdly, Frederick Engels’ statement in *Anti-Duhring* that “So long as a mode of production still describes an ascending curve of development it is welcomed even by those who come off worst from its corresponding mode of distribution”. There is still considerable truth contained in that proposition. It applies to the situation in Australia with this rider, that a minority of the working class that are more politically advanced are aware of what is taking place.

### **Marxism and science**

If we see Marxism as a science, as well as a guide to action, it is essential to bring it up to date. A suitable analogy can be found in the science of pharmacology. *Anti-Duhring* was first published in 1878. A pharmacy text book published in 1878 would be totally inadequate for contemporary use, both academic and practical. The same applies to all branches of science.

### **Disunity distressing**

What I find distressing is the disunity that prevails among the socialist groups that comprise the Socialist Alliance and the fact that it is made public. All comrades who say they are socialists should be able to agree on fundamentals. To publicise our inability to agree on them is a bad advertisement for the Socialist Alliance.

### **Concentrate on essentials**

For the present period we should concentrate on essential issues such as the Work Choices legislation, as well as the defence of civil liberties. For those who cannot agree on those basic issues, they should not be members of the Socialist Alliance.

A sustained campaign on what could be described as bread and butter issues can lead towards the attainment of unity.

### **The issue of autonomy**

The desire of the small socialist parties to retain their autonomy is [based on] the fear that a monolithic party could evolve and become bureaucratic. The Soviet experience of one party with its bureaucracy and autocracy could influence their outlook.

For the present it is prudent for the small parties to function and retain their identity. Their existence is known to a very small section of the Australian community. If they can use their organisations and publications to campaign for the repeal of the Coalition government’s reactionary legislation, and campaign for peace, they will be rendering a useful service to the community. We have no choice but to wait for the evolutionary process to eventuate.

### **Section 33 of the Draft Resolution**

I was very impressed with the sagacious prediction in Section 33 of the Draft Resolution. “If there is a new rise in the class struggle, new potential partners will be drawn into the project of a new party and the Socialist Alliance may have to become part of or be transformed into or supplanted by new structures for best organising the strongest political voice for anti-neoliberal resistance.”

Political parties are a means to an end, not an end in themselves.

## **Marxist precedent**

There is nothing Marxist theory to indicate that a working-class political party is destined to exist for an indefinite period. During the lifetime of Marx and Engels, a precedent was established with the formation and termination of the First International 1864-1873.

## **Learn from the past**

What is of paramount importance for a political party is to learn and benefit from the mistakes and successes of its predecessors and utilise that knowledge for current activities and problems.

This has been done by John Percy in his *A History of the DSP and Resistance (1965-1972)*. Those important lessons need to be applied in 2006 so that the Howard government's retrogressive legislation can be defeated.

# **Socialist Democracy no longer operating as an affiliate**

*By Ken Davis*

This should have been said long back, and it may be irrelevant now that the fate of the Alliance seems at best shaky, after a significant period of inactivity. By late 2005, almost all supporters of Socialist Democracy have left the Alliance, as have most of the previously highly-active and prominent independent members of the SA, and many of the members of the other "small affiliates".

Socialist Democracy ceased to function as an SA affiliate in 2005 and is no longer active as a group.

We had misgivings in nominating for the NE in 2003 and 2004, but comrades from DSP, other affiliate groups, as well as independents asked us to remain engaged, in order to retain diversity in the national organisation. In any case our formal affiliation has become inconsequential since in the last year or so, the few remaining public references by SA to the founding affiliates – only half of whom are still engaged -- have been excised.

Our group enthusiastically supported the establishment of the Alliance, since we thought a broad, pluralist alliance, open to all socialists, with a vibrant participatory internal democracy, and a rupture with the sectarian and undemocratic habits of much of the Australian left, would be a positive and necessary step towards building effective resistance by the workers' and social movements to neo-liberalism, war and imperialism in Australia and internationally. We saw the success of left unity in SA as depending on a period of trust building through collaboration on campaigns and of discussions to clarify new political analyses and strategies.

Unfortunately almost right from the start, the experience of our nominees on the increasingly de-powered national executive, was that each juncture, the majority has chosen to narrow the Alliance as a political project, by requiring that most branch and national activities are centred in DSP premises, by providing staff as assigned by the DSP, by selectively defining which Alliance "work" is valid, by extending the DSP's political culture, assumptions, methods, and habits across the Alliance, by running stalls with only DSP publications, by dumping branches "non-core" to the DSP, by centralising finances, caucuses, membership and activities in state of city-wide structures run by DSP staff, by defaulting to the DSP's program when Alliance policies are not yet discussed/adopted, and by the long and tedious process of making GLW the weekly publication of the Alliance... in short a project of assimilating the 700 or so non-DSP members of the Alliance as a semi-active periphery of a self-identified "cadre" Marxist-Leninist party leadership core. It seems a long while since all we were all equally valued and respected as Alliance members; now we are told we need to "be organised" and "serviced" by overburdened DSP cadres, or that our key role is to fundraise to keep the probably unsustainable printed GLW going.

If all the DSP/GLW needs is more resources, and better/more energetic cadre, if all the Australian left needs is more of the same as the DSP, then the answer would have been we should all join the DSP. But we formed the Alliance because our political projects were failing, and despite episodic upsurges against war or globalisation, the whole organized far left in Australia is decline, whatever its provenance. The left we have built or inherited, that was gestated in the 1967-72 radicalisation, has been mainly fighting (and losing) defensive battles since 1975. What we need instead of more of the same, are creative and innovative approaches, learning from the broad resistances against capitalism and imperialism, self-critical reviews of the limitations of our organizations and ideologies, wide-ranging and open discussions of strategy and program for the 21st century, and a radical process of rebuilding on new bases.

The move towards a so called "multi-tendency socialist party", which we saw as to say the least premature, was in practice a move away from a broad, democratic, participatory and pluralist project which values the diversity of lessons to be learned from the various resistances to capitalism. The "MTSP" paradigm was soon superseded with references to a "united revolutionary party" in formation. The pluralism originally enshrined in the SA constitution would have been comfortable with members exercising multiple identities as they saw fit, for example identifying at rallies as SA, as affiliates, as activists in a union or local peace group, as feminist, solidarity or anti-globalisation activists, as socialists of a particular tradition, as lesbian/gay, as Palestinian or Jewish, as indigenous or Latin American.... or whatever. Pluralism would allow for members to implement multiple and complementary strategies, or learn from contending analyses and interpretations, within a framework of overall political unity.

No real tendencies opened in the Alliance. If the DSP really were a tendency it would not have intensified its tight discipline, its front organisations, its closed top-down decision-making and non-transparent discussions, nor would its members have been able to select who represents the "non-aligned" in the Alliance. Alliance members would not be faulted for "fraternizing with the ISO". The three non-aligned comrades elected by slate as national conveners in 2004

would not have been members of a small and previously unannounced faction whose platform was not published. At the 2005 conference, even this second generation of non-aligned comrades, who had cooperated well with the DSP in the SA leadership, were deemed untrustworthy by the majority of SA delegates who were DSP members.

In contrast to the political resolution of the 2004 conference, the Alliance's central thrust in unions, election campaigns, and the social movements (environment, indigenous, peace, international solidarity, gay/lesbian) has been marked by sectarianism, and sometimes ultra-leftism. "United front" work in many instances degenerates into a vehicle for attempting superficial "exposure" of the perceived weaknesses of "political opponents". It shows arrogance and lack of respect for comrades outside the Alliance in the union movement, in the Greens, in the ALP, and in dozens of activist campaigns. SD supporters and many independents who were inside the Alliance became sick of the disregard, marginalisation and dismissal of the diversity of ideas and political work of those outside "the leadership team" (and I don't mean the elected NC or NE), and the lack of transparent inclusive discussion of the strategies needed for the far left to break out of its isolation.

For three years leaders of the DSP and its erstwhile allies have been relentlessly attacking ISO and the other affiliates for having agendas opposed to building the Alliance. DSP leaders routinely refer to the small affiliates as "sects" and as "sabotaging" or at very least "obstructing" the Alliance. So we need to restate that our supporters, when active in the Alliance, have had no organisational or political loyalty to building any other political project here or internationally -- of course excepting our respect for the participants and democracy of the unions and campaigns to which we contribute as individuals. SD did not "discipline" our supporters, nor did we seek to recruit members from the Alliance, nor prioritise our own sustainability, publications or finances. Our supporters have been active within the Alliance at branch and national levels, have recruited to the Alliance, have contributed financially and organisationally, have worked on election campaigns, have initiated and engaged in political discussions in the Alliance, as well as being active in various caucuses, demonstrations, unions and campaigns. We strongly supported the Alliance developing its own publications, and supported Seeing Red, though it hasn't met expectations. John Tully offered to help on the editorial board, but despite his experience as a newspaper editor, a historian and writer, was rudely rebuffed.

More than other groups we had publicly rejected the idea that we were some sort of nucleus of a revolutionary party, or that we uniquely had the answers for the Australian or global class struggle. As supporters of the Fourth International, we were inspired by over a decade of anti-capitalist regroupments in Europe, and parts of Africa, Asia and the Americas. Perhaps we are seeing the end of the era of "Leninist" revolutionary vanguard formations, repositories of correct tradition, program and organising methods, seemingly with a genetic predisposition (in Australia at least) of a self-limiting natural growth ceiling of 250-300 "cadre". If broader, more pluralist formations are not the way forward, then what are we learning from the revolutionary processes in Venezuela and in the broader region?

As to our oft alleged role in sabotage and obstruction in the Alliance, while never winning a vote at conference or NE against the DSP, SA minority comrades did argue against sectarian perspectives in the labour movement, against centring Alliance life on DSP premises, against tasking caucuses with building the SA/DSP rather than the overall struggles, and making GLW "the weekly paper of the Alliance". The anger of the majority on these questions could have been shorter-lived if instead of lengthy delays, denunciations and rebuttals; we could have quickly voted and moved on, accepting that dissent is not only a right, but is healthy and useful. To the charge that we obstructed the "handover" or DSP assets, or the "integration of the DSP as a tendency in the Alliance, well, we do respect all the work that DSP members put into SA, but at no stage were DSP premises, publications, staff, finances, education, or front organisations, passing out of ownership or control by the DSP.

SD supporters have and will make individual decisions about membership in the Alliance. Some of the original SD supporters have worked as independents in the Alliance since its foundation. Those of us no longer members of the Alliance continue to work with socialists inside and outside the Alliance on a range of campaigns and in our unions. We hope those that remain in the Alliance can change its direction towards a more healthy contribution to rebuilding a broad socialist movement in this country and internationally.

We begin 2006 without knowing how the class struggle in Australia will unfold, whether the union movement will be able to roll back Howard's offensive, whether or in what form the Alliance can be revived, or what decisions the DSP will make at its closed conference in January. It will be useful in any event, to draw balance sheets and lessons from the experience of the Alliance, and of the broader struggles over recent years against Howard's racist, pro-war and union-smashing agendas. Even if the SA project is failing, these last years have brought us into closer contact and collaboration, and has led to greater goodwill and respect between socialists from various backgrounds inside the SA, including in the DSP, the left groups outside the SA, and in the labour movement and Greens.

## **Open letter of resignation from the Socialist Alliance**

*By Michael Schembri*

I have been sitting on my resignation from the Socialist Alliance for many months. With knowledge of the DSP [Democratic Socialist Perspective] discussion bulletins that Greg Adler quoted from, I can no longer justify even my now nominal membership of the SA.

I anticipate the typical vilification that will be thrown at me from the DSP cadres. Therefore I need to explain a bit of my history:

- I was a leader of the Young Communist League in Malta
- I was twice elected Faculty of Education student representative at the University of Malta

- After coming to Australia I have been active in anti-racist, anti-war work, Palestine solidarity, lesbian/gay liberation and as a union activist for almost 17 years, and an elected union rep for 10 years, in Australia Post
- I am a supporter of the Fourth International, which has actively pursued regroupment projects (eg. Sri Lanka, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Quebec, USA, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Italy, UK, Scotland, Brazil, Portugal, Philippines.....)
- I participated in a tiny regroupment exercise many years ago
- I joined the Socialist Party (then called Militant) at a time of another bold regroupment attempt by sectors of the far left
- I left the SP primarily because that group refused to join the Socialist Alliance, a refusal which I thought highly sectarian and non-Marxist.
- I served for a time on the Alliance National Executive, representing the affiliate group Socialist Democracy
- I was one of the mainstays of the weekly Gaywaves program on the Sydney radio station 2SER FM for 15 years, and regularly promoted SA, socialist policies and anti-capitalist campaigns on air
- Currently I work as a union organiser.

Despite DSP attempts at denigrating the smaller affiliates, my experience as a member of the affiliate Socialist Democracy, was quite to the contrary. We did not prioritise our political life as a group above engagement with the SA nor did we attempt to work or caucus as a grouplet to the detriment of the SA. We had publicly rejected the idea that small groups, self-proclaiming as Leninist vanguards or nuclei, had any future. We supported the SA politically and financially, and contributed to discussions on policy areas, such as Palestine. We recruited not to SD but to SA, as a broad, pluralist and inclusive alliance of the left. Inside the SA we always argued and voted, not for our own interests, but for what we thought was the best path to a broader more effective socialist alliance.

In contrast, while pretending to become a "tendency" inside the Alliance, the DSP tightened its "Leninist" political, financial and organisational discipline, and caucused to advance its own interests against the independents and other groups in the Alliance, supposedly as we step by step increased mutual respect and trust among comrades. It controlled the staffing of the Alliance, where we met, which campaigns we engaged in, what education was allowed, what was and wasn't published. The agreed plans for a book never bore fruition, and hopes evaporated for a vibrant Seeing Red or a new Socialist Alliance monthly. Even an independent internet discussion was forbidden. Only the DSP's Green Left Weekly was mandated for all Alliance stalls and the conference majority voted over and over to extend the failing "trial" to make GLW "our paper".

In Sydney my comrade Ken Davis and I were instrumental in organising the SA entry in the Mardi Gras parade in 2003. Despite heavy rain, and support from very few in DSP, we had a great response from the hundreds of thousands of onlookers for our anti-war message and had great coverage in the Sydney Star Observer (a free gay weekly paper.)

I emphasise all this because DSP apologists typically don the mantle of anti-sectarianism and accuse the smaller affiliates of working against the SA.

We had high hopes for the SA, which we thought was an opportunity for socialists to break out of our increasing organisational and political isolation. After the Coalition got into government in 1996 there was a big change within the far left. Far Left groups and individuals within them started talking to each other. More, they actually co-operated with each other. The SA seemed to be a logical next step, not just here, but also in many comparable countries.

The project itself was initially designed to be an electoral alliance. However the DSP soon wanted to force the pace towards a regroupment towards a "united socialist party" with some sort of guaranteed leadership role for themselves, as the only real revolutionary Marxist-Leninists, and indeed as the only ones capable of organising activism. No one else supposedly had much role to play, other than financial support for the possibly unsustainable and increasingly narrow GLW. Not only was it not fair to demonise the ISO for insisting on the SA remaining what they had agreed to, but it was to be done the way the DSP (in alliance with the so-called Non-Aligned Caucus – or rather succeeding versions of it, most of whose leaders have subsequently been alienated from the Alliance) wanted it. This unholy alliance gave the DSP the numbers it needed; those who disagreed were vilified. In the last two conferences - in which the DSP consciously tried to limit participation - the DSP had a majority of delegates in its own right, even though it was a minority overall in the Alliance membership. Socialist Democracy opposed this forced pace because we maintained that there were issues to be sorted out first, primarily the way the DSP operated.

The DSP insisted that only "those who do the work" should take part in decision-making, or even write for the Alliance Voices, but the DSP defined valid socialist political work as only that (in terms of unions, campaigns, selling GLW, fundraising) which was perceived as important by its own apparatus, the survival of which is paramount.

The DSP flouted the unanimously agreed "united front" position of the Alliance in the lead up to the federal elections, and hyped its sectarian stance of the main enemy being the ALP and the factionally left unions. Claims were made, despite our minimalist electoral results, that the Greens were getting scared of us. The sectarianism of the DSP's stewardship of the Alliance makes it worse than irrelevant to me and my comrades in my union, struggling against the employers/Howard offensive.

They attack those independents and affiliates who are leaving the moribund Alliance as if we are abandoning the fight against Howard's new anti-working class legislation, but where has the DSP been, apart from selling a few GLWs at the mobilisations? The DSP have shut down most Alliance operations since the June conference, to send their cadre to Venezuela and concentrate on a secret and bitter debate about whether they are a Party or a Perspective, or whether

they will mothball the Alliance, a debate which seems to have no relationship to analysing the relationship of class forces in Australia or internationally, or developing a strategy for the struggle of the Australian working class.

The revelations from the DSP discussion bulletins not only vindicate our reservations about the process the DSP forced through. Unfortunately it is now evident that they envisioned the SA project as an attempt at hegemony and the destruction of other affiliates and traditions in the left right from the start.

The DSP now stands accused of dealing a severe blow to the project of Left co-operation and revitalisation.

However, as Greg Adler has already pointed out, I am glad that the world does not start and end with the SA-DSP. For those with the dedication, time and energy there is a lot of useful and urgent work to be done, particularly in the struggle for our rights at work.

## **The crisis in the Alliance**

*By Phil Sandford and Ken Davis*

Much to the joy of certain outside critics – a joy we do not share – the Alliance is facing a severe crisis. Whether we can resolve that situation or not depends very much on the decisions made by the National Executive in the coming period.

The worst of all outcomes would be to deny the harsh reality of the present situation, six months after a conference at which the DSP took total control of the Alliance, and its leadership at every level.

At a time when the Howard government has rushed through a stream of reactionary legislation and when workers face the biggest attacks in a century, the Alliance has only been capable of a very limited response. Individual members have been very active in this period, but often not as Alliance members.

We now learn that the largest affiliate, the DSP, includes a minority which has made a withering critique of the Alliance: “If we honestly think about SA branches, we have to admit: Despite local or temporary successes, on a national scale there’s not much there beyond ourselves... In fact, comrades, *our drive to turn SA into our party* has almost *killed SA*... Political realities are proving stronger than our intentions: more and more, SA is nothing but a front for the DSP.” (John Percy’s minority counter-report, “We Want Our Party Back”, on the DSP website), and a majority which is under the illusion that the Alliance ‘has won a stronger hearing for socialism in the working class than it has enjoyed for decades’.

The second-largest affiliate, the ISO, now advises us that it has been inactive in the Alliance for the last six months and plans to remain un-engaged in the Alliance, while still remaining an affiliate.

Given that context it is not surprising that many branches are not functioning; many comrades – including leading members with many years experience in the labour movement – have resigned or are inactive; a number of National Executive members are not attending meetings; there is little participation by non-DSP members or supporters in Alliance activities; most non-DSP members are refusing to sell Green Left Weekly (imposed as the de facto paper of the Alliance); and most of the discussion about the Alliance is taking place outside the Alliance.

The DSP members on the NE are bound by a DSP conference decision which dramatically overstates the actual role the Alliance plays in the labour movement and basically calls for a continuation of the policies which have led to the present situation. Despite many warnings from a number of comrades – including ourselves – the DSP’s perspectives have bought the Alliance to the brink of collapse.

We think the founding of the Alliance was a correct and necessary step forward for the left and the DSP and ISO deserve the credit for taking this initiative.

However, the present situation is so far removed from the early promises of the Alliance that it is hard to see how it is possible for non-DSP members to remain in it.

Perhaps the NE will be able to honestly face up to the present crisis and make some proposals to overcome it. If instead it tries to do some spin-doctoring and deny this situation the prospects for the Alliance are very bleak indeed. At the very least emergency state/district meetings for all members should be called to frankly assess whether and how the Alliance can continue in 2006.

Phil Sandford (National Executive member 2001 – 2003), Ken Davis (National Executive member 2003 – 2005).

## **In defence of the Socialist Alliance**

*By Amelia T (Gold Coast branch)*

For about the tenth time since I joined the Socialist Alliance (in 2001, shortly after its inception), apparently our own red sky is falling on our heads and we only have ourselves to blame.

I think I can honestly now say, that I have spent more time defending the SA from within, than I have promoting Socialism to others.

My inbox is filling up again with the diatribes of doom - we are finished!! This is the end!! There is no way back from here!! The DSP said this!! The ISO does (or doesn't) do that!! The non-aligned caucus really are aligned and are plotting the downfall of us all!!

By the way, there were also some serious race riots this week, and the Liberal government is well on its way to creating their police state. But there doesn't seem time for all that now.

What I want to say will be quite general, my apologies for not addressing people or ideas specifically but the amount of information that I have received this week means that any specific feedback to specific people would require me to undertake a thesis-like research program complete with annotated web-links!!

(for the record: 36 e-mails about internal SA matters, 7 e-mails relating to resignations, 12 e-mails from non-members wanting to know what's wrong with us, 6 e-mails asking me what I want to do about it, and 1 e-mail about combating racism and the need for a united front!!).

First, I am a Socialist - and always have been and always will be a Socialist! I believe that it is the single greatest answer to the greatest problem that has ever existed - the mass disparity of wealth between nations, and between the people of those nations. I do not believe that capitalism can be reformed, contained or legislated against. I support the uprising of the working class, and the redistribution of wealth and the control of that wealth to those who made that wealth possible in the first place.

I say this because I don't believe any person in the SA would disagree with this general sentiment - but start talking about which paper it should be written in and suddenly we have a problem!!

There have been a number of high-profile resignations from the Alliance in recent weeks. Former members are waving their resignations around Indy media sites and various e-groups like ransom notes!! Do something or I am leaving - this seems to be the way to get attention in the SA!!

Honestly, I think this approach is a cop-out - particularly when the writers attempt to bring down the whole alliance by advertising the apparent "disarray" of SA, or how we are now in "smithereens".

The only way forward is together. If you don't like something, work towards change!! If you think the DSP has too much power, then work towards recruiting more non-aligned members or gain more support from the broader community.

As a non-aligned member myself, I am sad to see other non-aligned members leave. I am sad to see any member leave the Alliance, particularly those that have experiences within activist and labour movements that could really benefit the Alliance.

"C'mon - I'm leaving because there is no solidarity", sounds like a line from a Monty Python movie.

I would ask that all those who have or may be considering leaving SA to reconsider - there are people in this country who need you! The workers need you! Our union members need you! Our students need you!

If a factional ruckus is going to tear us apart - then why not just become entertainers for John Howard and make him happy that way!!

I also want to respond to the apparent "demise" of the alliance that is getting a lot of coverage.

In regards to GLW sales - I refuse to use an economic indicator (no. of sales) to gauge the success of a Socialist group. There may be a number of reasons for this - possible because it has been a big year campaigning wise - and, yes!, that some branches sell other papers of other tendencies.

There are falling memberships being reported, and the fact that some branches have stopped functioning!! Then this is not the time to start tearing things apart - this is a time for greater solidarity, to band together, to look at ourselves honestly and ask what it wrong??

Some questions that I think should be asked:

1. Are members who join fully aware of what Socialism actually is, and what the SA does in the community?
2. Are members being put under too much pressure to "take sides" in factional arguments, rather that get involved with the broader struggle?
3. Are members being put under pressure to constantly "do things"? People join the SA for many reasons - and they may not want to spend their weekends selling papers.
4. Are new (or faltering) branches being given the correct guidance on how to manage a branch - from people who have been there?
5. Are branches (and members) aware that they can act autonomously within the Alliance?
6. Is GLW a true paper of the Alliance, without factional intervention?

I ask this last question honestly and openly - the amount of arguments each way have left me genuinely confused. This is not intended to be agitational or to stoke any arguments!!

Nobody ever said that being a Socialist was easy, being a member of a socialist party or group is even harder. It is even harder still to do it under the cloud of the most conservative government this country has ever seen.

But, I have no doubt that we will get through this current spate of ill-feeling, just as we got through the last mass-resignation here in Queensland a few years ago. I still run into the people who were involved in that one, we still talk, we still agree on mostly everything, I still look at a few of them as my political mentors. They just ran because the sky was falling in again!!!

I am not going to give up on the SA - even if I am the last member left, being dragged kicking and screaming into the philosophy of "it just can't work that way", "it's against human nature", "Australia just isn't a socialist country", etc., etc.

My branch is my inspiration - for everyday I meet new heroes!! We have members who fled brutal dictatorships, who spent years in prisons enduring unfathomable treatment for the right to be a Socialist or a Trade Unionist before gaining asylum in Australia. Some of us have lost friends and been alienated from our families, or lost jobs because of what we believe.

I asked one of our members whether it was worth leaving his homeland, his language and some of his family - all for the right to have the freedom to say "I am a member of a Socialist political party!"

His response: "Hell yeah!"

Don't ever forget what some others have paid! Don't ever forget just who it is we are fighting! And don't ever forget, that if socialism can survive torture chambers, international wars, brutal dictators, genocides and George W.

Bush - then we have a duty to ensure that it survives in Australia as a viable political alternative to capitalism. We owe our comrades everywhere that much.

Hold on to your hats comrades, we're in for a bumpy ride!! Provided we don't throw out hats in before we reach the end.

## **A moribund Socialist Alliance? Let the facts speak**

*By Lisa Macdonald (Sydney West branch)*

Since it became known that the Democratic Socialist Perspective membership was debating its approach to the development of to the Socialist Alliance in the lead-up to the DSP's January 2006 congress, a flood of declarations about the state of the Alliance and the role of the DSP within it has been posted to Australian and international e-groups and web sites. Many have been written by the same old critics who have never been Alliance members and are openly hostile to the aims and very existence of the Socialist Alliance. Some (reprinted in this issue of *Alliance Voices*) are from Socialist Alliance members.

For its part, the DSP - whose level of resources commitment to the Alliance had, by mid-2005, begun to threaten the viability of the DSP itself - had been forced to turn energy and resources to restabilising its own organisation. This enforced retreat from the DSP's previous perspective inevitably raised discussion—within the DSP, among Alliance members and among interested observers on the left—about the sustainability of the Alliance, especially given the importance of the DSP's contribution to it.

Within the DSP, that debate was resolved at its January congress, when an overwhelming majority of delegates voted in favour of continuing to commit the DSP to building the Socialist Alliance as a new party project (the main documents in this discussion can be found on the DSP website: <http://www.dsp.org.au>).

In this context, most members of Socialist Alliance must surely welcome a constructive discussion about the Alliance's work and future. As the Howard government's attacks continue to rain down and Labor more often than not caves in, it's crucial to continue a serious debate about building a more effective fight-back, strengthening the impact of socialists on Australian politics and furthering left unity.

It's also important that the activity level or degree of political development of any of the Alliance's membership structures and campaigning activity are not exaggerated. A realistic picture of the Alliance's strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities and blockages it faces is indispensable for identifying what needs to be done to further develop SA's work.

But making an accurate, realistic assessment with the goal of working out how to strengthen the left unity and movement leadership so far embodied in the Socialist Alliance is a very different thing from denouncing the Alliance without even bothering to find out the facts. Yet some contributors to the present debate have even tried to claim that the Alliance has become inactive and that most of its branches have ceased to function. But what is the reality?

### **Our political campaigning**

I shall discuss the situation of Socialist Alliance branches in the next section. But Socialist Alliance members have been participating in many other ways in political campaigning and movement work, and in the recent period it is this form of participation that has given the Alliance its greatest impact on politics.

Most obviously, it has been during this phase of supposed "inactivity" that the Alliance has been steadily increasing its work in the national campaign against the Howard government's anti-union and anti-worker laws. Alliance members and our allies were instrumental in making the nationwide mass protests for union and workers' rights on June 30/ July 1 actually happen. Moreover, without the pressure generated by Socialist Alliance and its collaborators, the historic November 15 protests would have been considerably smaller and less militant.

Much of this work has been generated and coordinated through Socialist Alliance's national Trade Union Coordinating Committee, which has been meeting regularly throughout 2005-06. Through its efforts, collaboration with the militant unions in Victoria and Western Australia has strengthened, creating the axis that has been responsible for driving the ACTU and right-wing unions into action.

At the same time, a lot of Alliance members around the country have passed Alliance-initiated motions in their unions and circulated sign-on statements and petitions, which have helped put real pressure on union leaderships, first in the Free Craig Johnston campaign and then in the campaign against Work Choices.

At the community and rank-and-file union level, Socialist Alliance branches have been getting good attendances at and responses to community showings of *Actively Radical* TV's documentary about the resistance to Howard's IR laws. Alliance members have been building networks between those—within and outside unions—who want to fight Howard's attacks on union and democratic rights via the Alliance-initiated Emergency Response Network, joining picket lines at particular worksites and collaborating with and participating in broader union defence organisations (such as Union Solidarity in Victoria).

The positive response to the two national Socialist Alliance leaflets on Howard's IR laws and how to fight them (produced in August and November 2005) have led to more trade union activists than ever joining us. The now broadly sponsored petition initiated by our Trade Union Coordinating Committee calling on the ACTU for a national stoppage and mass protests early in 2006 is a key initiative. It has helped maintain momentum for organised resistance to Work Choices, as an ACTU official recently acknowledged when he said that the peak body had been "inundated" with faxed completed petitions!

What has happened here? Isn't it clear as day that the unity of the left embodied in the Alliance plus all the painstaking work it has carried out over the past four years has given socialists, anti-capitalists and progressives a power of initiative in the real struggle that they haven't enjoyed since the days of the old Communist Party of Australia? Isn't it clear that no single SA affiliate organisation could possibly have matched this?

This influence has increased also because Socialist Alliance organising within individual unions and across unions at a state and territory level has been growing. There are cross-union caucuses of Socialist Alliance members and supporters in WA, NSW, Victoria and now South Australia, and a number of national union-specific caucuses that coordinate via email lists (in the National Tertiary Education Union, teachers/education unions, and Community and Public Sector Union). Socialist Alliance caucuses are being formed in other unions.

In November and December last year, Socialist Alliance activists in the CPSU led the rank-and-file Members First campaign in the poll for national officer positions, winning around 20 per cent of the vote. This result, when combined with the vote going to another ticket protesting against the inaction of the union's leadership, weakened the position of the incumbents. It has further opened the way to presenting a positive alternative in that union to passive acceptance of the Howard government's agenda for the federal public sector.

In the social movements, Socialist Alliance has also continued to play an important role. It has initiated, and many members have participated in, anti-war and refugee rights actions locally and nationally (most recently helping to build and participating in protests in support of the West Papuan asylum seekers). Alliance members have been active in civil liberties networks and actions (including in the Justice for Jack and Free David Hicks campaigns, against Scott Parkin's deportation and most recently against the police confiscation of "offensive" artwork by Melbourne artist, and SA member, Azlan McLennan).

The movement against Indigenous deaths in custody, including the specific campaigns for justice for TJ Hickey in Sydney, Mulrunji Doomadgee on Palm Island and Douglas Scott in Darwin, has also seen important Alliance participation. In NSW, the campaign for the right of same-sex couples to equal treatment before the law would have barely limped along without the work of Socialist Alliance queer rights activists.

Moreover, if it hadn't been for Socialist Alliance the anti-war movement would not have had much of a public face in this country since the invasion of Iraq. It's been up to the Socialist Alliance to instigate many protests in this area—against Bush, on the anniversary of the criminal invasion of Iraq and against Howard's "anti-terrorism" laws.

Then there are groups of Socialist Alliance members (most of whom are not members of any Socialist Alliance affiliate organisation) involved in the *Seeing Red* editorial board and the Socialist Alliance-*Green Left Weekly* editorial board. The latter board has produced, every week, a "Our Common Cause" column in *GLW* (see the board's progress report to the Socialist Alliance National Executive published in *Alliance Voices* Vol 5, No 11), and the fifth issue of *Seeing Red* is about to appear.

There are now also more avenues for the broader Socialist Alliance membership to discuss and work together in areas of mutual interest and activity via the increasing number of national campaign e-groups that have been set up by members in the last year or so. A lot of discussion and campaign work has been facilitated through these e-groups, which now include groups around civil liberties and democratic rights; refugee rights; women's rights; justice for Indigenous people; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights; anti-war campaigning; a Socialist Alliance-*Green Left Weekly* copy group; and a social justice charter group focussing on welfare issues.

As if all this were not enough, at the same time as carrying out all this campaigning, the "inactive" Alliance has managed to get around the bureaucratic obstacle course of electoral registration, last year passing rigorous electoral commission membership reviews both in Victoria and federally.

## Local branches

But what, then, of the state of the Socialist Alliance's branches? An honest and objective reckoning of their condition would have to:

- register that there has been a decline in political life in some branches, but at the same time as growth in others;
- account for the reasons for these shifts; and
- view the situation of the Socialist Alliance's branches within the context of its overall activity.

Our starting point here must be the thorough consultation between Socialist Alliance's national Membership, Finances and Branch Building Committee and the local branches in the lead-up to the national conference last June. Confronted with the reality that membership participation was waning in a number of branches, the conference delegates adopted the National Executive's recommendation that emphasis be shifted away from very frequent Socialist Alliance branch business meetings towards other ways of involving the broader Socialist Alliance membership in the issues and campaigns that they were interested in.

This was a recognition of a fact of life: after the frenzied activity in the run-up to the 2004 federal election, many members didn't want or were unable to attend fortnightly branch meetings, but did want to contribute to Socialist Alliance in other ways. (By the way, contrary to some recent claims, the delegates to this conference were not a majority of DSP members—in the heat of the present debate some independent members who were delegates seem to have been branded DSP members without their or the DSP's knowledge!)

So, firstly, there have been less local branch meetings in most states since June 2005. The Socialist Alliance membership judged that this was a good thing, not least because it helped create more space for other forms of Socialist Alliance activity and discussion that were more appropriate to the real political context we faced after Howard's 2004 victory.

But fewer local branch meetings has *not* meant that most branches have stopped functioning. The National Executive is currently surveying all local branches to collect more information about the Alliance's membership, activities and plans, so a more detailed picture will be available soon. But even before that survey is done a quick review of our branches nationwide shows the claims of the majority of branches' demise to be ridiculous and completely out of touch with the life of the organisation.

In Perth, two out of three Socialist Alliance branches (where the overwhelming majority of members are not members of any of the affiliate organisations) have grown in numbers and participation over the last six months. The third branch is not meeting regularly, but organised a successful public film showing/discussion in the latter part of last year and maintains contact with progressive activists locally.

Perth branch has just launched an ambitious campaign in the Victoria Park by-election, standing unaffiliated Socialist Alliance member and union activist John Tattersall as our candidate.

In Adelaide, the branch has been meeting consistently and attracting new members. It has recently established a caucus for trade unionists and is now in the midst of an election campaign in the seat of Port Adelaide, where it has built up a good profile and network of supporters over the last 12 months or so.

In Melbourne, three out of five branches have continued to meet regularly, participate in local campaign groups and activities, and have a strong street presence. Melbourne West branch stood in two wards in the Maribyrnong Council elections in November, winning three and four per cent of the vote.

In Geelong, the Socialist Alliance is widely recognised as leading the Geelong and Region Trades and Labor Council (in which Socialist Alliance members Tim Gooden is secretary and Craig Johnston is a leading delegate), and is a key driver of just about every progressive campaign in that city. Sceptics who sincerely want to find out the truth about Geelong Socialist Alliance should ask ... Geelong ALP officials!

The regional branches in Central Victoria and Ballarat are smaller and less active, but maintain contact with a network of members and supporters in those regions and organise street stalls and occasional public meetings.

In Hobart, the branch has continued to meet regularly, organise a wide range of public events and participate in every significant campaign in that city. This month, the branch decided to put together an Socialist Alliance ticket for this year's (yet to be announced) Tasmania state election.

In Canberra, the branch continues to operate pretty much as it always has, perhaps a little more informally. The Socialist Alliance branch in Darwin has been less active since the middle of last year, but has a loyal membership.

In Queensland, two branches are operating in Brisbane and there is a lively branch on the Gold Coast, which has been carrying out an impressive casual workers' rights campaign, and a proto-branch on the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane. Individual Socialist Alliance members in northern and central Queensland towns stay in regular contact with the Socialist Alliance state conveners and actively promote Socialist Alliance projects (petitions, *Green Left Weekly*, etc) in their towns.

In regional NSW, Socialist Alliance branches meet regularly in Wollongong, Newcastle and Lismore, and there is a very active proto-branch in Armidale and another in the Blue Mountains. The Socialist Alliance branches in the regional towns have initiated and led in a number of local campaigns and actions.

In Sydney, Socialist Alliance branches continue to meet and do local work in the inner city, west (around Parramatta-Auburn) and south-west (Bankstown) areas. The inner-city Socialist Alliance branch (previously the Marrickville and Central branches) ran a good outreach campaign in the Marrickville by-election in September. The northern suburbs branch members agreed last year to merge the branch into the Sydney Central, and the eastern suburbs branch members have agreed to collaborate more informally (by phone, at the weekly street stalls in the local area, etc.) so they can respond to local and citywide political developments as they arise.

There are another hundred or so Socialist Alliance members outside these cities and towns, who Socialist Alliance communicates with via the state committees. All-member state conferences have been held in South Australia, WA and NSW in the last six months, and the Victorian state committee is in the midst of planning an ambitious public/outreach state conference for March.

One of the most encouraging aspects of Socialist Alliance branch growth has been that socialism and the struggle for working people's rights is now represented in a string of regional towns where the affiliate organisations couldn't possibly have maintained a presence on their own account.

In areas like the Gold Coast and Armidale, good work by Socialist Alliance comrades has put the Alliance at the centre of progressive politics—a lot of demonstrations and protests just wouldn't happen without their efforts. This can take the form of building a local presence for national protests (like the Alliance's role in the Work Choices protest in Armidale), or of building "indigenous" campaigns like Gold Coast branch's efforts in unionising and organising the region's casual workers.

None of the above means that we can be complacent about the state of a number of Socialist Alliance branches—quite the reverse. But any possible solution to re-engaging members in branch activity, whether it comes in the form of branch amalgamations or re-launches, or a new program of activity attuned to the concerns of the community where the branch is, will be found not on the basis of a general theory of the supposed "irrelevance" of the Alliance. It requires a steady, concrete analysis of what has and hasn't worked in branch building to date and what sort of activity has chance of engaging members' interest.

## **The political context**

One notable feature of the present debate is indifference to the real state of the political battlefield on which the Alliance has to operate. But who can deny that the Australian left, across the board, has been doing it hard in recent years? No individual far-left group has grown significantly or led any major or successful campaign, let alone had a serious impact on the class struggle in this country. Some have even decided to shut up shop, such as the former Socialist Alliance affiliate Socialist Democracy. The left as a whole, like many individuals, has to a greater or lesser extent been battered by a long period of stagnation of the working class movement and by the brevity of most protest in the face of Australian capitalism's permanent economic "restructuring", and relentless advancing of social inequality and alienation, and war.

But even in that context, what the Socialist Alliance has achieved, with all its limitations, has given the radical left a broader political influence in the trade union movement than ever before, as well as a greater leadership role in the other social movements than it has had for decades. Moreover, the respect won by the Socialist Alliance took place in conditions where the main electoral space to the left of the ALP was taken up by the Greens (although the success of the Socialist Party's Stephen Jolly in a local council election in Melbourne last year indicates that the Greens' dominance in the electoral sphere is not automatic or for ever).

There are a now quite a few leaders in the militant unions who have joined or are happy to be seen as close allies of the Socialist Alliance. This is based on the respect the Socialist Alliance has won in a few struggles in the last few years, strong trade union campaigns (including the defence of Craig Johnston when he was jailed), and Socialist Alliance's leadership in the anti war movement, especially when some of the more conservative sections of that movement retreated after the invasion of Iraq.

The significant political capital accumulated by the Australian left's modest (and far from unproblematic) start at a regroupment through the Socialist Alliance persists. This is why there is a reluctance on the part of most of the founding affiliates to leave it, even though most individual members of some of the affiliates are not actively building Socialist Alliance. (It should be noted, however, that this has been the case for a number of years, and that the members of the small party affiliates was never more than 10% of the approximately 1000 Socialist Alliance members since 2003).

All the internal struggles in the Socialist Alliance over the last couple of years have actually had relatively little impact on its broader appeal. Socialist Alliance movement leaders like Craig Johnston and Indigenous activist Sam Watson command a wider respect than any individual member of any of the founding affiliates, and the public profile and respect won by the Alliance in actual struggles means that Socialist Alliance continues to join members every week. The proportion of the membership that is unaffiliated is higher than ever.\*

If there is one overarching lesson to be learned by the left from the development of the Socialist Alliance to date, it is that broader political authority is only won in real, patient and painstaking struggle. Such leadership and influence (being able to make a noticeable difference in Australian politics) is precious, and it is much easier to blow than to accumulate.

That truth should be in the forefront of all our minds as we discuss the state and future of the Socialist Alliance. These discussions take place - whether it is acknowledged or not - in a context of the fundamental question still confronting all of us who call ourselves socialist: are we serious about trying to build a new workers' party, a genuine alternative to the rotten Lib-Lab duopoly? The Socialist Alliance is no longer just a good idea - it has a track record now, it has proven in practice that this is possible, and it has taken more steps down that path than any left organisation has dared or achieved for decades. And if not the Socialist Alliance, what?

The Alliance's achievements to date are just the beginning of the story. In the emerging fronts of resistance to Howard's attacks - whether in the militant trade unions, or union-community coalitions, or campaigns in defence of civil liberties and against war - there are leaders of working-class struggles beyond the Alliance who should be part of a broad coming together of all those who want to resist and develop the people-centred alternative. It was, after all, also in that perspective that last year the Socialist Alliance initiated a broader network of trade union militants called the Fightback Network, which we hope will have a second national conference later this year.

The Alliance needs to be prepared to collaborate and even eventually fuse with any broader forces of resistance that may emerge. This may not be an immediate prospect, but everything we can achieve in building the Socialist Alliance now—the most significant actually existing left regroupment at the moment—will make for a stronger, broader regroupment of the left in the future.

To that end, constructive, concrete proposals from all Socialist Alliance members about how to do things better, how to strengthen the Socialist Alliance, broader left unity and the campaigns against Howard's attacks, are valuable and necessary. Destructive and divisive misinformation is not.

#### **Footnote**

\* Of the four resignations from the Socialist Alliance received in the last two years, two were from members of small affiliates (Greg Adler from Workers League and Michael Schembri from the former Socialist Democracy). Of the two unaffiliated members who resigned, one explained in his letter that while he supported the Socialist Alliance, he was worried about being associated with a socialist organisation because that may mean he is targeted by the state under the new "anti-terror" laws. All founding affiliates remain, except Socialist Democracy, which informed its supporters in its December 4 newsletter that it had decided to cease functioning as an organisation.

## **What's up with the Socialist Alliance?**

*By Mark Lockett (Perth branch [and National Executive member](#))*

## **Crisis, what crisis?**

It's a funny way to find out that the Socialist Alliance is dead by receiving an email, but that's the way it happened.

It surprised me, my branch seemed to be going quite well. At our last branch meeting we had had 13 members in attendance 5 were members of the DSP, 1 a member of the ISO and 7 were not members of any affiliate. The non-aligned are a mixed bunch – 1 former member of the Greens and refugee rights activist (yours truly) 1 former member of the CPA and former trade union militant 1 former member of the ALP and former trade union militant 1 supporter of the Fourth International 1 former member of the British WRP 2 self described Greenies The branch decided to hold 4 public meetings in the first three months of 2006. Hardly a political party that has collapsed and is being propped up by the DSP. Indeed our WA state membership is currently at record high levels.

The Perth branch of course is not the only branch of the alliance that is still operational, the sad reality however is that a large number of branches, particularly in the major East Coast capitals appear to have simply stopped operating.

## **Demoralisation, what demoralisation?**

The DSP attempts to blame the current problems of the Socialist Alliance on demoralisation caused by the defeat of Latham in the 2004 Federal Election. This despite the fact that the DSP was loudest of all in proclaiming that the re-election of Howard made no difference.

While I have no doubt that some people were demoralised by the victory of Howard a lot of us were prepared for just that, Howard had won what had seemed an unwinnable election 3 months beforehand in 2001. However a few people in the alliance and activists outside it were demoralised by this. Some people were demoralised by the fact that the alliance polled so poorly and that the DSP (who function as main internal mouthpieces of the alliance) did not wish to discuss this issue. Eventually the Federal Election campaign committee did address the issue but it was too little too late.

The real source of demoralisation came later. Never the less, in the federal election the alliance was able to run the biggest socialist election campaign in decades and was able to run campaigns in regional and outer suburban areas that had never been within the reach of the left (at least to within living memory).

The problem was that *Green Left Weekly* had only played a very minor role in the whole campaign. In fact far from *Green Left Weekly* being the 'scaffolding' around which the alliance was formed the practical tasks of the election campaign formed the 'scaffolding'.

After the election the DSP made a turn back towards it's usual modus operandi, orientation towards movement activism and prioritising *Green Left Weekly* sales and distribution. The DSP tried to simply lead and hope that others might follow, ie they attempted to simply 'progress' *Green Left Weekly* to the next level and make distribution of it an alliance task they also sought to simply remove anyone who disagreed with this line from the editorial board. The non-aligned majority on the national executive balked at this and voted down the DSP's extremely sectarian proposal by a majority of just one vote.

The DSP then generalised it's assault on the Non-aligned leaders of the alliance and got rid of them by engaging in factional manoeuvring of the same type we commonly see from ALP hacks. Once the conference was over the DSP simply switched off the alliance a large number (probably a majority) of branches have not met since the conference. Instead the DSP has concentrated on distributing and fundraising for *Green Left Weekly* and sending 20% of their members on a trip to Venezuela. This is a source of demoralisation, when there are people around who want there to be a new worker's party and the people who are supposed to be doing it are off doing other things.

## **Web of Lies**

The DSP told what were four big lies in the course of 2005.

- That the DSP did not have a majority at the 2005 national conference of the alliance.
- That the DSP did not produce and distribute a how-to-vote card for that conference
- That Alex Miller and Dave Riley were actually non-aligned members of the Alliance.
- As stated in the DSP NE recommendation to the DSP conference "...national executive that includes prominent trade union and social movement leaders such as Craig Johnston, Sam Watson and Tim Gooden. The challenge is to try to develop this into an effective leadership." (The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance: Draft resolution for the DSP congress, point 11)

The first three need no comment the position of the DSP has been totally exposed and admitted to. In the case of the fourth one, Johnston and Watson simply do not come to meetings of the Socialist Alliance National Executive, Gooden has been a member of the DSP for many years. The actual attendees at National Executive meetings are the DSP, the NAC aligned independents and the Freedom Socialist Party's Alison Thorne.

The problem is when you start spinning a web of lies you get caught up in it. Even the thing about Johnston and Watson is cover for the disastrous restructure of the alliance National Executive at the last conference and the accompanying attack on the Non-align National Conveners and their supporters. Quite a challenge indeed.

The above 4 items are not the only things in the web, there are many more actually. They simply are the only ones well known nationally.

This is another source of demoralisation, the Socialist Alliance is should be a step towards a new workers party but here we have the leading faction behaving like the worst elements of the old 'worker's party'.

## **The 2004 Election and the Greens**

Firstly the socialist alliance put in a very poor performance in the 2004 election no questions about it. For our most well known candidate the (then) Assistant Secretary of Geelong Trades Hall to have gotten much less than one percent was very poor.

But the results represented something of an aberration. In the run up to the election the alliance scored some much better results. Coral Wynter got 1.6% for the seat of Brisbane in the Queensland state election and 3.5% in the Brisbane council election but only manage a paltry 0.39% for the federal seat of Brisbane. Lynda Hansen got 3.0% for the South Brisbane state seat but saw that collapse to 0.72%. The alliance got 3.1% for the seat of Inala (outpolling the Greens at two polling booths) but in the federal poll Mike Myles (in Oxley) got hammered getting only 0.45%.

In the Tasmanian upper house by-election for Elwick, Kamala Emmanuel scored a respectable 5.4% but in the Federal poll got only 0.85%.

After the election thing picked up again. The local government elections in Victoria held 7 weeks after the Federal poll the alliance got between 4% and 13% over 5 different wards. Even in the much maligned Marrickville by-election the alliance was able to improve on the vote in Grayndler and in fact got a higher vote than in 25 out of 26 electorates in the federal election.

That's not to say all of our other election campaigns got good votes, our vote in the WA state election was pretty ordinary but then again we deliberately engaged in a strategy that would allow us to best use the resources (ie people) at our disposal rather trying to maximise our percentage vote.

The 2004 election was also a poor performance for the Greens. Before the election there was much talk that the Greens would win seats in the Federal lower house, as it turned out they didn't come anywhere close to doing that. They couldn't even muster a second place. All this in spite of having a sitting MP. The WA state election it got worse, sitting state upper house member Jim Scott tried to move to the lower house. Not only did he not win, not only to he not come second he actually suffered a swing against of approximately 1%. The WA Greens woes were not limited to Jim Scott they suffered an overall decline in the Upper House a tiny increase in the lower house (only bought about by them standing in more seats than the previous election) and the loss of 3 of their five seats in the upper house. This was very embarrassing for them in an election where their main 3rd party competitors (the Democrats and One Nation) had collapsed. In Marrickville the Greens once again failed to take a single member seat that seemed to be in reach. One thing can be said from all of this, the Greens have not increased their hold on the electoral space to the left of Labor over the last two years if anything they have lost their hold.

## **Left Reactionaries**

It is the case that Australia's worst reactionaries are the left. Something happens and the left reacts. There is a race riot in Cronulla and Dave Riley creates the 'Racism No' blog. Did it ever occur to him to create it six months, twelve months beforehand? The racism of John Howard has been apparent for a long time now. Of course the Racism No blog has hardly any comments on it, and as a consequence we can say hardly anyone reads it. It seemed to die out after about two weeks anyway. I don't wish to unfairly single out Dave over this, he was simply doing the same thing that the rest of the left do, something happens they react. Nor is that to say that we shouldn't react, what we need to do is not do more than just reacting. For example the refugee rights movement held a very successful protest at the Baxter Immigration Detention centre in March this year, we even were able to win real improvements in the conditions of asylum seekers. Refugees were not a big issue in the news when organisation for that protest began.

The Socialist Alliance also has the ability to overcome the reaction of the left and be an actual progressive force for social change. Our 2004 Federal election campaign was just such a campaign. Pre-selections were conducted early (in most places) campaigns were prepared before hand. Despite the fact that we scored a poor result we were able to mobilise more people than had been done for a socialist election campaign in Australia for a very long time. This is a very stark contrast to the election campaigns run by the DSP before the founding of the alliance. These campaigns were typically slapped together at the last minute, poorly run, few people outside the DSP were ever involved and the actual result was without exception ignored.

The Socialist Alliance could have done a lot better though. For an organisation that is nearly five years old it is to our shame that we have no meaningful policy and no program. The 2003 conference voted to authorise the production of a book about socialism, it was never mentioned again. To this day should someone ask the question what does the Socialist Alliance do or stand for? We can only point them to a shambolic collection of motions passed at various conferences.

## **The Future for the Socialist Alliance**

The above may seem pretty bleak but it is rather easy to resolve the problems of the Socialist Alliance we only need to do two major things

- 1) Develop decent policy and a decent understanding of the role we play in the class struggle. This shouldn't take up the majority of our time, but a determined effort that makes sure it takes up more than no time will may sure it gets done.

- 2) Vigorously contest the upcoming state elections in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. As well as vigorously contesting the 2007 Federal election. Elections are what the Socialist Alliance was created to do and over our five year history they are what we have done the best. This should not be seen as a timeless solution for the alliance's current problems, it is simply a way of jolting the alliance out of it's current slumber. Anyway the Socialist

Alliance is the only party that we take up working class issues serious, in the last elections both the Greens and the ALP didn't.

But growing the Socialist Alliance requires not just bringing in new members but developing a new leadership. Despite the fact that it was not its intention, the previous policy of reserving 50% of all seats on the National Executive and the existence of the Non-Aligned Caucus was able to do exactly this. Therefore in order to further develop the alliance we should return to a structure resembling the former structure and end the current situation where all meaningful decisions are made by the DSP full timers.

The above is in stark contradiction to the DSP position which is that the alliance should be transformed (maybe this has already happen?) into a trade union caucus. This is best summed up by the quotation from their document "It [The Socialist Alliance] remains the best available political vehicle to win over more militant trade union leaders and work more closely with a wider layer of working-class militants in the current political conditions." (The Democratic Socialist Perspective and the Socialist Alliance: Draft resolution for the DSP congress, point 18)

The unfortunate reality is otherwise, in the two and a half years that Chris Cain has been state secretary of the MUA no members of that union have become active in the Socialist Alliance who weren't active before his election. That's not to say the MUA Rank and File group and the Socialist Alliance aren't allies, they are. The Socialist Alliance has grown by recruiting mostly old lefties.

The Socialist Alliance should play to its strengths and not to its weaknesses. We won't overthrow the old order in the immediate future but modest progress is possible.

## **Mark Lockett's exercise in defamation**

*By Dave Riley (Brisbane Central branch)*

In this edition of Alliance Voices Mark Lockett asserts that I, along with Alex Miller, were members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective at the time of the June 2005 national conference of the Socialist Alliance.

Mark circulated this accusation not only for internal discussion within the SA membership via Alliance Voices, but also to the 800+ subscribers to the Green Left Weekly discussion e-list, and the Western Australian Socialist Alliance members' e-list. It has also been archived on the Ozleft web site.

Into this last flurry of broadcasting, Mark Lockett generated a more substantial allegation, to the effect that "Dave Riley is a BARE FACED LIAR - he accepted the nomination for the National Executive on the basis of not being a member of an affiliate - by his own belated admission he applied to (re)join the DSP before the conference and was told to wait until afterwards by the DSP political committee. Rejoining the DSP was the first thing he did when he got back home.\*"

I'm not one to rain on anyone's parade, but Mark Lockett is dealing in lies. These allegations are not true at all. He is trading in material generated from the gossipers and maligners behind the Ozleft website, which is hardly the almanac of the real life in the Socialist Alliance. As we are so often warned, don't believe everything you read on the web.

Mark, unfortunately, when I challenged him over the veracity of his accusations, has not had the guts to declare his sources. (But if anyone doubts me I suggest you ask Comrade Lockett himself as to where he got his "facts" from.)

There is no proof to these allegations at all because none exists as they are not true. And I asked him to retract them, especially when he had so creatively embellished the original furphy. By the time this story goes around again, I'm sure to be the devil incarnate or John Howard's love child!

Lockett has unilaterally decided that this information is correct, or at least useful, and without any qualms whatsoever, denigrated a fellow comrade in the SA on the say so of such a poisonous and hostile source. As it was pointed out to him on the National Executive, this sort of conduct, which slanders fellow SA members, makes a mockery of democracy in SA.

The chronology is something like this. I fell very ill after the SA conference and couldn't participate in anything. When I began to recover and in the context of the industrial relations mobilisations I joined the DSP. End of story.

Unfortunately, the Alliance has been home to many factionalised debates such as this, ratcheted up by carefree use of lurid flame words. It perhaps wasn't very smart to put in writing such personal slanders but there are nonetheless sectors within the SA who celebrate such foolishness and delight in spreading smears, especially if it involves accusing anyone they don't agree with of being a stooge - or a member - of the DSP.

I only hope that we can all learn from this exercise in defamation, and in future be more considerate of the facts and one another in our exchanges.

### **Footnote:**

\* These comments were circulated on the National Executive and later forwarded by Lockett to the Western Australian SA e-list. Mark also conveniently forgot to mention that I am now serving my third term on the Alliance National Executive having been elected by three consecutive national conferences. Over the past three years I have been very open in expressing my political opinions and have been more active than most NE members in assuming leadership responsibilities. My crime, apparently warranting my vilification, was that I joined the DSP.

## **A reply to Mark Lockett's claim of dishonesty**

*By Alex Miller*

In his article “What’s up with the Socialist Alliance” in this issue of *Alliance Voices*, Mark Lockett is implying some dishonesty on my part and on the part of the Democratic Socialist Perspective concerning my membership of the DSP. If he really thinks that someone has lied about this he should tell us where and when the offending lie was told.

For the record: Prior to late June 2005 I was not a member of the DSP, but a non-aligned member who broadly supported the role the DSP was playing within the Socialist Alliance. I made no secret of the fact that I supported the DSP. I joined the DSP - largely in solidarity with them against destructive sectarian attacks such as that promulgated by Mark - and since then I have certainly done nothing whatsoever to conceal the fact that I had joined the DSP.

To repeat: Mark, if you think a lie has been told, you'll have to tell us where, when and by whom.



