

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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SA Tasmanian election campaign

By Susan Austin, Hobart branch

There is nothing like a snap state election to get a small branch moving. Premier Paul Lennon called the state elections 6 months early, just after the saving of Reseach Bay, (which he tried to take credit for), and timed to coincide with the Commonwealth Games for maximum distraction.

Our branch was still trying to get organised after the new year break and the move interstate of two leading comrades, and we already had some key projects we were working on (like the anti-war national day of action, campus orientation week and a forum in Launceston). However, we all wanted to participate in the elections [held on March 18] as a way of highlighting socialist solutions to the state's problems, building our profile and attracting new members. We also wanted to use the election campaign to organise ourselves and our supporters into a team, learning new skills along the way.

We knew that the Greens were the main pole of attraction for progressive people in Tasmania when it comes to elections, as they already have members in parliament and are seen as the most realistic political alternative. This was heightened when early polling showed that the Greens stood a chance of winning the balance of power, leading many people to throw their weight behind the "This Time Vote Green" campaign. The Wilderness Society held a big rally (about 3000 people) on the Thursday before the elections, highlighting the destruction of old-growth forest that is ongoing under Labor. However, the Greens backed down on their drugs policy, alienating some of their supporters, and there was still a need to project a socialist voice.

We discussed our campaign priorities and broader questions of policy at several SA branch meetings, thinking through the socialist approach to dealing with problems such as the failing health system, the housing crisis and police corruption. We decided to highlight the industrial relations issue, as last year's November protests of over 600,000 people showed that this was the crucial issue in Australian politics and dominated people's concerns. We included an "Open letter to Premier Paul Lennon" in our leaflets, calling on the state government to do more to protect workers' rights and disrupt the implementation of the regressive federal laws. At the same time we also highlighted issues of health, welfare, privatisation, civil liberties and the environment.

We elected two candidates, Linda Seaborn for Denison, and Mathew Holloway for Franklin. Linda was well networked, most especially as the state convenor of the Council of Single Mothers and their Children, and Matt as an activist in Resistance and with the Police Reform Alliance and prison reform groups.

As a minor party, we struggled to get a hearing in the media, and were usually left out of "Meet the Candidates" forums or panels at rallies. However, through some assertive follow-up we did manage to reach out to a broad audience through:

- Matt speaking at a Meet the Candidates' forum at Hobart College
- Linda speaking at the Tasmanian Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Rights Group Meet the Candidates forum
- Matt speaking at a civil rights forum in the town hall
- Linda speaking at a child protection rally on parliament lawns (for which she got the biggest applause, and comments for days after by people impressed with what she had to say)
- An interview on Edge community radio
- Small write-ups in the Mercury newspaper on 4 occasions
- A mention on ABC online and Tasmanian Council for Civil Liberties web page for our stance on the civil liberties issue
- A 300-word statement in Huon News
- A one-page explanation of Socialist Alliance and what we are all about in the United Nations Youth Association young voters guides handbooks, which were distributed on uni and elsewhere.

As well as this, we produced 5000 printed leaflets, which we mainly distributed from campaign stalls, outside shopping centres, and at events and rallies (including union, women's and environment events). We involved 3 new members in this, and one new person and three or four other members did some letter-boxing.

Matt organised copies of our more comprehensive policy platform to give out at stalls etc. And at the last minute, in response to a \$300 donation to run radio ads, and with the help of a Brisbane SA member, we pulled together a punchy 30-second ad that asked "Are you a corporation? No? Then why vote for parties that represent corporations ..." went on to profile SA and finished with a plug for the anti-war rally, our web site, and our activist centre. This was run on 3 radio stations on the Wednesday before the election.

We organised three of our own events during the election campaign - an election launch and forum on March 11, featuring Fred Fuentes talking about "Socialism in the 21st century" plus talks by our candidates, a campaign stunt in the mall on the health issue, and an election night party at the Hobart Activist Centre.

The health stunt was one of the highlights of the campaign. We managed to source a wheelchair and 8 hospital gowns, and made up 8 placards which, when put all together, read: "Tassie's health system, on death's door. Socialist Alliance says: Quality health care for all, not just the rich - take back the Hobart Private hospital!" On the back of our placards were the slogans "Vote 1 Socialist Alliance" and "For the millions not the millionaires".

We chose to do this action in response to pre-election polls finding that health was far-and-above the main issue of concern for voters, and the debate among the major parties about the need for a new hospital. It was a very effective

little protest, as it was visually striking, lots of fun, and netted us lots of support from bystanders. Unfortunately the media didn't respond to our press release and did not cover the event.

Rene campaigned among the El Salvadorian community, some of whom put signs on fences, helped distribute leaflets and helped with the election night party. Whole extended families voted together for the Socialist Alliance, and the women in those families have offered to cook meals at SA events in the future to help with raising money.

We did a mail-out to 180 members and contacts, promoting all the different events going on, explaining our campaign and asking for help. We also enclosed membership forms and this has prompted 3 people to renew. We plan to follow this mail-out up with phone calls in the next month to encourage more people to join or renew.

We didn't manage to do thorough contacting in the lead-up to the elections, and our campaign fund raising fell short of our expenses, depleting our bank account by a few hundred dollars.

Had we been bigger and more organised we could have achieved much more, but given our situation at the time, everyone has agreed we ran a good campaign. Unfortunately the Liberals, Labor, big business and the Exclusive Brethren religious group all ganged up on the Greens and ran a massive smear campaign in the last few weeks, which meant that the initial support for the Greens at the polls deteriorated. Much to the disgruntlement of many members, many unions supported the re-election of Labour, refusing to also promote the Greens or SA.

Labor has been re-elected with a majority. In fact, the whole thing has left us with the status quo, that is, the same number of ALP members were re-elected (14), Liberals (7) and the Greens managed to hold their four positions although it was a close shave in Bass for Kim Booth.

With 92% of the votes counted, Socialist Alliance has won 0.4% or 241 votes in

Denison (less than Tasmania First and Christian Democrats) and 0.4% or 253 votes in Franklin. This is an improvement in Franklin, where last elections (2002) we won 0.33%, but in Denison it is less than the 0.7% we got that year.

I scrutineered on one of the booths when they were counting the votes, and saw that many people voted one-to-five for the Greens, then put SA sixth. Many people have approached Linda saying they voted for her, but it turns out they put her after the Greens, which does not show up as a vote for SA. Next time it would be worth putting more effort into educating people about how to make their vote count.

Neither of our candidates had stood for election before, but both got lots of practice at talking politics, public speaking, making leaflets, organising radio ads, and general campaigning. This steep learning curve and the experience of running in elections has led to extra skills and increased confidence in the branch.

Now our challenge is to reach out to those 500 or so people who voted for us, and the many more who preferred us, to get them involved in some way. As we said to people time and time again when explaining how we were different from the other parties: "We are active all-year round, not just at election time", we have to make sure we keep up this public, campaigning approach and build Socialist Alliance as we go about our work in the Industrial Relations, anti-war, Venezuela solidarity and other campaigns. One of the people on our e-list send us this email: "Congratulations on your success in the elections. (Note: I think that being a little voice speaking out from the crowd is a success)."

We ran a decent campaign, but must continue to work towards turning this "little voice" into a much bigger one.

Report-back from Victoria Park by-election

By Mark Lockett, Perth branch

Our candidate was John Tattersall who is an unaffiliated SA member and a delegate for the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. [The by-election was held on March 11.]

We finished on 131 votes or 0.83% of the total. The vote was similar to that received by the alliance in other elections.

For the campaign we produced and letterboxed 10,000 leaflets, this represents approximately half the residences in the electorate.

We held a picket outside Skilled Engineering's offices on Welshpool Road in Cannington during morning rush hour.

We distributed leaflets outside of the Victoria Park Shopping centre (basically a high street area) and at some train stations in the electorate.

John spoke at a meet the candidates forum (not sure who it was organised by).

On polling day we were able to staff 10 out of 13 of the polling booths, which covered approximately 85% of the votes. 38 people campaigned for the alliance in the election, this represents approximately one-third of the state membership.

The by-election campaign cost us about \$930 and we managed to raise \$970.

The branch decided to campaign on the issues of civil rights and workers' rights particularly Work Choices legislation.

My opinion

The good

The choice of John Tattersall for the candidate was the choice we made. He brought a some new ideas to the campaign and focussed on casualisation and labour hire which easily fitted in with our priorities.

The fact that John was a ordinary blue collar working class bloke was a positive against the three largest parties candidates: ALP Ben Wyatt - lawyer, Liberal Bruce Steveson - Real Estate Agent, Greens - Dee Margetts academic.

The bad

Campaign organisation was too late and too informal. Because the by-election was a surprise we were always in a race against the clock, specifically I believe if we should have been able to staff every polling booth. In the federal election we covered 33 and in the state election 20.

Background to the by-election

Geoff Gallop's resignation in January citing depression came as a surprise to everyone. Although some conspiracy theories have abounded that he actually jumped before the pro-uranium lobby pushed him. They have been quite vocal in WA for the past year or so. Gallop was originally elected in 2001 on the back of a strong environmental issue (logging in old growth forests) and has associated himself strongly with pro-environment forces. State environment minister Judy Edwards resigned from the ministry (but not from parliament) on hearing of Gallop's resignation. She seems likely to exit politics at the next election.

As for the results, the ALP had 6% swing against on primaries about half of that went to the Liberals. The Greens also suffered a small swing against. The swing against the government was very modest this is probably one of the main contributing factors to the demise of state Liberal leader Matt Birney two weeks after the election.

The turnout for the election was very low, only about two-thirds of the voters voted. The campaign received very little publicity in the state wide media and it was general regarded the ALP would win it easily.

Initial report on South Australian election campaign

By John McGill, Adelaide branch

This is a personal view on the Adelaide SA branch's campaign in the seat of Port Adelaide in the March 18 state election.

The decision to run was postponed till almost too late. Some comrades thought it better not to waste effort and money on a poorly prepared campaign, especially with a number of cultural events happening in Adelaide throughout the election campaign. Comrades in favour argued that an election campaign would be a way to get the branch started up for the new year and for a campaign aimed at Work Choices, in Port Adelaide where we have our highest public profile, and to run a candidate with union credentials.

The overall election campaign was predictably pedestrian. The ALP ran a presidential-style campaign with heaps of TV ads targeting the Liberal leader as an ineffectual bumbler and Mike Rann, the premier, as an efficient CEO, who gets things done.

In the eight weeks leading up to the election, SA held regular stalls on weekday evenings and on the weekends in Port Adelaide. We set up an A-frame stating "Defeat Howard's Work Choices, sign up and fight back". Initially, we were getting people to sign the petition calling on the ACTU to take industrial action, but when that closed we were asking people to sign up for the Workers' Rights Action Campaign (WRAC). At times we had 3 or 4 people queuing up to sign.

Around 20 people came to the SA election campaign launch and we made over \$250 on the night. Bob Briton, local secretary of the Communist Party of Australia, helped letterbox and hand out how-to-votes. Two weeks before the election, about 10 members and supporters gathered at Taperoo Railway Station and letterboxed most of the peninsula. Rob W, a CFMEU member, coordinated the SA letterboxing. (The only other candidate to do so was the ALP incumbent and he paid Australia Post to do it for him!)

On polling day, we covered the 7 polling booths in the Port and peninsula area, with 16 helping out on the day, including Greg, a fire fighters union member who responded to our appeal for help in Green Left Weekly, and Alex, a retired wharfie who we met at our stall.

On the day, Rob W and Eddie (an NUW member) were working so were unable to help out. Tom and Helen were invaluable with their enthusiasm, letterboxing and on polling day. Other people involved included Carl, Emma, Johanna, Karen, Leslie, Mark, Melissa, Michael, Nick, Renfrey, Rob G and Sam.

We have over 100 people's contact details on the WRAC list now. When I announced this at the SAUnions meeting on Wednesday, I got a round of applause. The CPA are very enthusiastic and we have also involved the Greens (even though they preferenced us after the Democrats, after verbally assuring me we were their first preference).

With 73% of the votes counted we had received 205 votes (1.3%). The campaign cost us around \$1000: candidate nomination \$450, campaign leaflet \$330, how to vote leaflet: approximately \$200. After printing bills are paid we will have approximately \$600 in the bank, with some pledges still to come in.

The first meeting of WRAC takes place next Thursday, 30 March.

SA industrial relations campaigning

At its meeting on February 26, the SA National Executive agreed that:

(i) That the national Trade Union Committee finalise a motion and petition for faxing to the state/territory Trades and Labor Councils calling on them to organise mass delegates' meetings and calling on the ACTU to organise a national stoppage and mass protests against the IR attacks by no later than June 7.

(ii) SA members consider organising, along with other unionists, a protest action in their city on the day the Work Choices laws are enacted.

(iii) SA help build and participate strongly in May Day rallies this year.

(iv) To not proceed with the June long weekend as a possible date for the proposed national trade union fight-back conference and SA national conference because at least two state ALP conferences are being held that weekend. Sue to report back on other dates after discussing this with other unionists.

At its subsequent meeting on March 26, and following a report from the National Trade Union Committee on progress in the campaign against Work Choices, a socialist response to the issue of guest workers and the Gold Coast branch's Casual Workers Alliance, the National Executive decided:

(i) That SA members campaign in their trade unions and state and territory trades and labour councils to ensure that the ACTU-recommended June 28 national day of protest is a mass protest and stoppage.

(ii) That SA continue to push for mass delegates' meetings to be held in all states and territories where they are not already being held.

(iii) That SA members participate in May Day organising committees and raise advocate a workers' rights and anti-racism theme where possible.

(iv) That SA organise united contingents for May Day marches and invite others to join the contingents.

(v) That SA produce a statement and model motion around guest workers, racism and workers' rights.

(vi) That SA mass produce stickers with the slogan "Your rights at work - worth striking for", finances permitting.

ACTU Executive resolution on the IR legislation campaign

Adopted March 7, 2006

The Executive notes that the Howard Government's "WorkChoices" legislation is to be enacted during March, and that Regulations and further legislation, in particular concerning independent contractors, are also scheduled. All of the industrial relations legislation, coupled with the encouragement by the government of cheap imported labour, represents a significant threat to the pay, living standards and job security of Australian workers. The ACTU and unions and their members throughout Australia are determined to fight the Government's attack on working people. In doing so the Executive endorses the following campaign activities for 2006:

- Industrial activity to defend and improve the pay, employment conditions, health and safety and job security of union members and workers generally through union organization and collective bargaining;
- Continuing opposition at the parliamentary level to the legislation;
- Strengthening the broad community alliance;
- Deepening the understanding of the impact of the new laws at the workplace, and involving delegates and activists in campaign planning;
- Identifying examples of abuse under the new laws and bringing them to public attention;
- Strengthening industrial capacity and collective bargaining;
- Rallies and public events;
- Paid advertising;
- Effective campaigning in marginal seats;
- Internet campaigning;
- Supporting the High Court challenges;
- Building international union support and challenging the laws in international agencies;
- Developing alternative policy approaches to address the real economic needs of Australia and the necessity for decent rights for working people; and
- Developing a united approach to IR policy and advocating the adoption of the union policy by the ALP.

As it is essential the legislation is repealed, the Executive endorses a political and community strategy to build support

amongst our members and in the Australian electorate for the repeal of Federal IR legislation and the achievement of decent rights for working people. In particular unions commit to in principle:

- Participate in the joint union political campaign;
- Identify union members who live within selected target seats;
- Contract a polling organization to identify members who are undecided voters in target seats;
- Structured contact with these members every two-three months (approx 4 or 5 times) in the lead up to the election;
- Track these members; responses and issues on a database;

- Consider seconding or resourcing a full-time targeted seat co-coordinator to the ACTU to work full-time within a selected seat until the next election;
 - Encourage members to be involved in local committees and participate in seat activities; and
 - Visit key workplaces in the target seats.
- The Executive also supports national activities including:
- Workers' events to protest the introduction of the WorkChoices legislation;
 - May Day activities;
 - A Community Forum on 28-29 May 2006;
 - A week of activities, 25 June-2 July, with rallies to be held on Wednesday 28 June 2006, under the National Community Action banner; and
 - A further National Day of Community Protest involving a Sky Channel broadcast in mid to late November.
- The national activities and rallies will:
- Demonstrate support for collective bargaining
 - Highlight the damage done to workers' rights on the anniversary of the government controlling the Senate, in particular the impact of individual contracts;
 - Encourage members to stand together in their own workplaces and industries to protect wages and conditions;
 - Commit to be vigilant in identifying victims affected by the WorkChoices;
 - Call on all political parties to develop policies which protect workers' rights; and
 - Encourage members' participation in targeted seat activities.

We're the majority — let's show Howard what democracy means!

Following is the text of the Socialist Alliance leaflet distributed at the March 29 meeting of 1800 union delegates in Victoria.

"Poll after poll [has] demonstrated that the Australian people don't agree at all with anything we are doing on this—we have minority support for what we're doing." —Finance minister Nick Minchin to anti-union H. R. Nicholls Society on new "Work Choices" IR laws

Just eight months of Howard control of the Senate have produced:

- The Building and Construction Industry Improvement Act which puts polices on worksites and fines workers \$22,000 for refusing to incriminate themselves.
- Work Choices legislation which gives employers and government the power to destroy unions and the entire union movement.
- Anti-‘terror’ laws which enable people (unionists too) to be held without access to a lawyer.
- The sell-off of Telstra, a massive public utility that could fund hospitals and schools.
- Voluntary Student Unionism that seeks to destroy the rights of students to organise.

1. We can win — let's not roll over!

- The vast majority of Australians oppose Work Choices. ACTU research shows that less than one in four Australians support the laws, and almost 70% believe that they will benefit big corporations and hurt ordinary families. The job is to impose the will of the majority—let's make sure our unions act to give the majority a voice.
- The bosses are vulnerable. The economy is booming, the corporations are making their biggest profits ever and there are skills shortages in many industries. Industrial action would cause big pain for big business.
- We can win with an industrial as well as a community campaign. Remember how we stopped their plans to wipe out the MUA in 1998? We need to make the employers who try to use Work Choices pay for this with a loss of profits and by being shamed before the whole community. Combine industrial action with mass protests to build community support then the majority will prevail.
- We won't be fooled by Howard's divide-and-rule tactics. If Howard faced a united movement of all Australian workers against Work Choices, the laws would collapse like a house of cards. That's why he tries to divide us on other issues, always pushing to spook us about “threats” from terrorists, Muslims and refugees, and create suckers for his own side. Let's not be fooled.

2. Leave it to the ALP pollies? No way!

- Beazley Labor is presently at short odds to lose the next federal election. In Canberra we have a corrupt, lying, anti-worker, pro-war government on the rampage, but the ALP “opposition” can't lay a glove on it.
- Even if Labor wins in 2007 it may be far too late if we do nothing in the meantime. By then our unions will have been cut to pieces. That's what happened in New Zealand right after the Employment Contracts Act became law in 1991—entire unions disappeared as union membership shrank to a shadow of its former self.
- If we don't fight now we'll have to fight in much worse conditions. If they get away with implementing Work Choices, they'll come at us again. In his speech to the H. R. Nicholls Society Minchin promised a further round of attacks on worker rights: “There is still a long way to go ... awards, IR Commission, all the rest of it.”

- ALP industrial relations policy is still anti-worker. Kim Beazley says that the ALP will rip up Work Choices. Yet he has also caved into pressure from corporate Australia and says Labor will keep Australian Workplace Agreements, which business used to undermine collective agreements and which paved the way for Work Choices.

3. Let the workers run the campaign!

- When this battle first started the ACTU wasn't even convinced about the possibility of protest. Only pressure from committed unionists (including Socialist Alliance militants) and Victorian Trades Hall Council got them moving. Last year mass delegates' meetings in Melbourne and Perth were crucial to the mobilising 300,000 in June-July and 560,000 in November. Such meetings should be held in all states and become the motor of the campaign.
- We need to prepare for a showdown. Sooner or later a point will come when a union or worker refuses to pay a fine and the whole union movement and community will need to provide a wave of solidarity—as happened during the 1998 MUA fight. We need to prepare for this now. Our unions, community organisations and union-community networks must be ready to swing into action as soon as this happens.
- We all need to be active. We won't win this fight with "business as usual" unionism, expecting our unions to act on our behalf. We all have to get more active and more organised. Then we will win.

SA anti-war campaigning

The SA National Executive meeting on February 26 agreed to:

- (i) Endorse the protest against British PM Tony Blair's visit to Australia called by ACT NOW, and request a Socialist Alliance speaker at it.
- (ii) Endorse the national peace conference to be held in Melbourne in May, negotiate the sponsorship fee (\$200 in cash or kind) with the organising committee and encourage SA members in anti-war groups to see what interest there is in hosting one or more of the international speakers in their city in late May-early June.
- (iii) Prepare a "Why you should protest" leaflet with an SA clip-off to help build the March 17-19 "Troops out" protests, and possibly another leaflet for the rallies themselves.
- (iv) Encourage a focus on joining people to SA and distributing *Seeing Red* at the March 17-19 rallies, with a discount offer for back issues.

New National Executive member

Amelia Taylor, a founding member of the Gold Coast branch of the Socialist Alliance, and also of SA's National Trade Union Committee, has accepted the invitation of the National Executive to join the NE. Welcome Amelia! Amelia is filling the vacancy left by Alex Miller's move to England.

SA branch launched in the Blue Mountains

By Terry Townsend, Blue Mountains branch

A meeting of Socialist Alliance members and supporters held on April 2 in Katoomba decided to charter a local Blue Mountains branch of the SA. There are currently 10 financial members of SA living in the Blue Mountains (between Lapstone and Lithgow). Seven were at the formation meeting and two others who were unable to attend indicated their support beforehand for forming a branch.

There was a lot of discussion at the meeting about the sort of campaigning SA could do in the local area, how to get information out to secondary students, the need to reach out to other progressive groups in the area to do united broad left work, how to use *Green Left Weekly* and *Seeing Red* locally, the need for a small pamphlet clearly outlining the impact of the Work Choices laws on people and what they can do about it, the value of holding some discussions about the socialist alternative, and how to involve people in the national workers' and union rights protests on June 28, and May Day.

It was agreed that the next event be a screening of Actively Radical TV's new documentary on the industrial relations campaign, on Monday, May 1, to be publicised as a May Day event in the Blue Mountains. It was also agreed and that at that film showing we investigate the interest among others in organising a broader public forum/BBQ to discuss the workers/union rights campaign and possibly establish a broad coalition to build union-community links from such a gathering.

A three-person branch convening committee was elected. The committee is open to any other Socialist Alliance member who wants to participate in it.

To contact the branch, email <bluemountains@socialist-alliance.org>

Re-organising SA finances

The March 26 SA National Executive meeting adopted the following changes to the organisation of national finances:

(i) To replace the branch pledge system as the foundation of national income with periodic, nationally organised finances appeals, and negotiate with each branch the repayment of as much of their branch pledge debt as possible before writing off remaining pledge debts.

(ii) To conduct a national "fight-back" finances appeal from May 1 for 4 weeks, with branches receiving 30% of all funds raised from members of their branch.

(iii) To collect as much of the branch and state committee debts for publications and merchandise, and Seeing Red, as possible by the end of April.

(iv) To encourage all branch/state committees to conduct a membership renewal campaign by the end of April.

(v) To eradicate the main recurrent national expense by conducting the National Executive meetings from April by internet conferencing (using Paltalk or the equivalent), and recommend to the national Trade Union Coordinating Committee that it investigate doing the same.

New SA anti-Howard T-shirts

The Socialist Alliance in Sydney has just printed a new run the Rosie the riveter "Up yours Howard" T-shirts, in preparation for the various workers' rights actions, for use on stalls, etc.

The Sydney comrades are happy to take orders from other Socialist Alliance branches and members (to spread the fundraising around).

The T-shirts are available in both Bonds and standard styles, and a variety of bright colours (red, yellow, green). The cost for individual members is \$20 each. Bulk orders from other branches are \$12 each or \$10 each if you order more than 10.

To order, or for more information, email <johngauci2000@yahoo.com> or <sydney@socialist-alliance.org>

Letter of solidarity to the Philippines left

The following letter of solidarity was sent on March 3 to: Laban ng Masa; Partido ng Manggagawa (Labour Party Philippines); Bayan Muna (Citizens Action Party); and the KMU.

Dear comrades,

The Socialist Alliance in Australia extends its solidarity to your organisation and all others in the Philippines struggling to resist the illegal and repressive state of emergency declared by President Gloria Arroyo last week.

We fully support the Filipino people's right to freedom of assembly and freedom of speech, and to openly protest against the effective imposition of martial law.

Members of the Socialist Alliance are actively supporting initiatives in Australia to demand the immediate release of the arrested trade unionists, opposition politicians and other democracy activists, and for the lifting of the state of emergency.

We would appreciate being kept informed of your struggle.

In solidarity,

The Socialist Alliance National Executive

Socialist Alliance in action: branch briefs

Illawarra May Day preparations - Will Williams

The South Coast May Day Committee is gearing up for what will hopefully be massive May Day protests this year. The 5 members of our SA branch who are part of the committee decided to argue for the following demands for May Day this year: No to Work Choices; Repeal VSU; Defend civil liberties and No to Welfare to Work; all under the banner, "Workers of the world unite!" After a lengthy discussion, the committee adopted these demands. The presence of SA's student comrades who hold office-bearer positions in the Wollongong SRC was decisive in getting the demand to repeal VSU included.

Newcastle activities - Simon Butler

Comrades in Newcastle branch have been busy! Our February 7 jointly organised Socialist Alliance/Green Left Weekly public meeting titled "Why Australian nationalism is so racist" attracted 13 people. Comrade Sarah S presented an interesting talk covering the whitewashing of Australia's multicultural past and the racist mythology surrounding mainstream notions of Australian culture.

A joint Socialist Alliance/GLW fundraising film night on February 25 packed out the Newcastle Activist Centre. 41 people came to see Ciaran O'Reilly from the group Swords into Ploughshares present his short film *Peace on Trial*, which we followed with *The Fourth World War*, an excellent film narrated by Michael Franti.

Newcastle SA also played an important role in International Women's Day this year. Ruth R argued successfully in the organising group for a street march as part of this year's event, then designed the IWD poster and spoke on the rally

platform for Socialist Alliance. We're following up with an April 4 public meeting titled "Feminism: more important now than ever".

Our branch is also conducting an SA membership campaign through late March/early April, and organising an SA trade union committee meeting to plan for the build-up towards June 28.

March 18 vigil in Armidale - Bea Bleile

On March 18, 28 people attended a silent vigil in front of the Armidale Court House to mark the third anniversary of the illegal invasion of Iraq and mourn the dead. More than 100,000 people have been killed in Iraq since 2003.

The vigil was called by Armidale Women in Black and endorsed by the Armidale Community Network and the Armidale Socialist Alliance. Banners called for the withdrawal of troops, for schools and aid, not bombs, and pointed out that "Foreign Occupation Breeds Terrorism". While the 28 people only represented a small proportion of the crowd of 5000 which attended the biggest ever anti-war rally in Armidale in February 2003, the vigil and the leaflets distributed by the activists were very well received by the community.

I stayed in the mall after the vigil handing out leaflets and selling GLWs. It went really well and I met Paul who was keen to join the Socialist Alliance.

Armidale Socialist Alliance now has regular (short) organising meetings followed by "Politics in the Pub" every second Wednesday.

Brisbane discusses red armband view of history – Paul Benedek

About 50 people packed the Activist Centre on March 8 to hear Humphrey McQueen speak on "The Red Armband View of History", organised by Socialist Alliance. The SA members and many other Brisbane leftists enjoyed Humphrey's engaging presentation, which ranged over many aspects of class-struggle history.

Having heard that day that the ACTU had finally been pushed into some action and called the June 28 national day of protest, we were able to announce an SA trade union caucus meeting for March 16 to organise for June 28, the May Day rally in Brisbane and an SA-initiated fight-back conference we're planning for May.

Melbourne West and North East on Work Choices - Ben Courtice

An SA Melbourne West branch-organised public forum on March 7 screened the Actively Radical TV video of the November 15 NDA for workers and union rights, and featured SA member and Victorian AMWU state president Chris Spindler. Chris spoke about the state of unions' readiness for the new industrial laws and how they plan to fight them. Discussion included topics such as rolling industrial agreements into common law deeds to protect conditions which are banned under the act. Next on the SA Melbourne West agenda is an organising meeting for branch members to discuss building the Union Solidarity campaign group in the local area.

Meanwhile, Melbourne North East SA branch's first public meeting for the year was addressed by comrade Craig Johnston. The meeting attracted 23 people who heard Craig outline how he thinks the IR struggles will play out this year. He emphasised a two-pronged strategy: maintaining and building pressure on Trades Halls and the ACTU for mass stoppages, and looking for opportunities to challenge the implementation of the laws. He emphasised picking our fights carefully, and noted the important role that the Socialist Alliance has played in the IR fight.

Moreland rallies against racism - Jody Betzien

In response to Peter Costello's whipping up of racism against Muslims, the Wills SA branch decided to call a local rally themed "Stand Up for Multicultural Communities – Racism will not divided us". We approached the Islamic Council, Union Solidarity, CFMEU and Moreland Council to support it.

The rally attracted 130 people. SA members, Greens supporters and many faces new to us made up the crowd. Clearly there were people who were as angry as us when they heard Costello and Co on TV and a few weeks later were determined to do something.

The police informed me that the rally and march were illegal, but that they wouldn't make any arrests.

The rally was extremely well received by the shop-owners and shopper along Sydney Road as we marched, many of whom are from a Middle Eastern background. As I walked past one shop I heard one of the staff say to a customer, "It is about racism against Muslims and war; fantastic".

The Greens candidate, a local councilor and the federal member Kelvin Thomson all spoke. Kelvin Thomson was notable in that he made sure he mentioned the arrest of three young men in the area by the federal police in the previous night.

In addition, Rayian, a young Muslim student, spoke about the impact of the current racist climate on Muslims. Vanessa Hearman gave a great talk on behalf of Socialist Alliance about the importance of taking action on an ongoing basis that was pitched around her experience of being from an immigrant family from Indonesia. Omar M (brother of one of the 10 arrested in the raids last year) was scheduled to speak, however, due to the arrest of three more men in raids by the feds the night before the rally he was busy with lawyers at Barwon prison. Ray F spoke from Civil Rights Defence about these issues in his stead.

This demo was very important in putting SA at the centre of politics in the suburb and building the confidence of people generally that the progressive activist voice is alive and well.

Packer "dis-memorial" gets world-wide media – Alex Bainbridge

An initiative of Newcastle SA activist Peter Mc – to protest at the state-funded memorial service for tax cheat, billionaire and corporate media mogul Kerry Packer - turned into a highly successful action in Sydney on February 17. Several dozen protesters managed to insert their, and working people's, anger at the state and federal governments' hosting of such an event - at our expense.

A number of media outlets reported on the protest, and did follow-up interviews with Peter, myself and Duroyan F, acting SA NSW state convenor. (The protest was also given pre-publicity by the *Sydney Morning Herald*.)

Marce C's wonderful impersonation of John Howard definitely helped gather the tourists and many sympathetic onlookers. ABC TV news showed Alex B holding a "People before profits" placard and Duroyan was quoted by the *SMH* web site saying: "John Howard's promotion of a billionaire as a great Australian is a poke in the eye to the hard-working people on whose backs Packer's riches were built", and that message was repeated in the international media coverage.

Peter has continued the campaign around the "Dis-memorial 6" - the six activists who were arrested for spruiking at the protest.

Canberra SA builds the anti-nuke campaign - Alison Dellit

Canberra Socialist Alliance branch's first public event in some time went really well. We organised Greens Senator Christine Milne, Sue Wareham from the Medical Association for the Prevention of War and Tim Stewart from the Socialist Alliance to speak at a public meeting under the title "Nuclear Power: Alternative or Weapon?".

The attendance was around 30 people (we found out afterwards that security had locked the doors to the building at about 7.15pm so who knows how many gave up and went home). SA member Jude M put a lot of the work in to build the meeting, helped by Jen, who played a key role, and Heidi and Ben. Peter from the anti-nuke group also helped build it, plugging it at the anti-Blair rally.

The speakers were good. Christine Milne focussed on debunking the myths around nuclear power. Sue Wareham knows the science extremely well and it showed in her talk. The discussion was interactive - most of those who came spoke. These were people interested in action and in exploring the issue further.

We made a real effort to work with a budding anti-nuke group that an activist has just set up. Everyone in the room put their name on the list to get involved in the group and they decided to call a meeting of it on the spot, given the numbers at the SA meeting.

Hobart SA helps refugee family - Linda Seaborn & Rene Aragon

The family of Vanessa Ceren and Nestor Rodriguez from El Salvador have been living in Hobart for 20 months. They have no family in El Salvador, and their three children are settled in Hobart. Their application for a visa was recently rejected, and they are now threatened with imminent deportation. Vanessa is seven months pregnant.

The extended Ceren family have been supporters of Socialist Alliance for some time. They participated in the recent state election campaign and have offered to cook for SA fundraising events. An SA activist contacted us to solicit support and solidarity for this family.

We called a snap rally for that afternoon, and started calling our supporters and members. We rang Tasmanians for Refugees, who were key in securing a visa for another refugee threatened with deportation in 2003. They came on board straight away and sent out a call to all their members to come to the rally. The Tasmanian Greens sent a message out on their activist alert list, and endorsed the rally. MP Harry Quick sent a message of support from Canberra.

We painted a banner "No Deportation. Let the Rodriguez-Ceren family stay", sent out a joint media release with Tasmanians for Refugees, rang the media and got down to the protest (with the paint on the banner still drying!).

The phone was ringing all day with people wanting to help and make donations. One man rang Tasmanians for Refugees and wanted to make a request to be deported in their place!

About 50 people came to the protest, with most just dropping by to express support, but not stay for long. The *Mercury* covered the story well for a second time and mentioned SA.

This has been a positive example for our branch of taking up a local issue and struggling with the people, alongside the people and for the people, so that this family is not alone.

Duncan Kerr's office has now organised meetings with the Department of Immigration and at least two prominent lawyers have offered their services for free. If this pathway fails, we need you to be ready to take action – public meetings outside your local department of immigration offices, ring the radio, be ready to make your solidarity for our comrades concrete.

This is what SA needs to do more of to win more political credibility. We need all branches to be ready to campaign with us and this family.