

# Alliance Voices

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## CONTENTS

Support the WA construction workers! Defend our right to strike!	2
Call to SA members: Join the campaign to defend the right to strike <i>By Sue Bolton &amp; Tim Gooden</i>	2
300,000 march for workers' rights	3
The people's demands	5
`Welfare-to-Work' and `Work Choices' - two sides of the same coin	6
For a nuclear-free future and <i>real</i> solutions to climate change	7
Justice, not paternalism	8
Minor parties to be deregistered <i>By Lisa Macdonald, SA national office</i>	8
Omission and inclusion <i>By Bernie Rosen, Bankstown branch</i>	9
Report on Seeing Red <i>By Dick Nichols, Seeing Red managing editor</i>	10
National executive resolutions:	
<i>SA's anti-war campaigning</i>	12
<i>SA's trade union and workers' rights campaigning</i>	12
New Socialist Alliance e-newsletter	13
Join a Socialist Alliance campaign e-list	13

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

# Support the WA construction workers!

## Defend our right to strike!

*The following statement was issued by the Socialist Alliance on July 7, 2006. Please send urgent messages of solidarity to the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union of Western Australia at <jmellor@cfmeuwa.com>.*

One hundred and seven construction workers on the Mandurah to Perth rail line are facing fines of \$22,000 each, simply for taking industrial action last February.

Their industrial action was to get their union delegate, Peter Ballard, his job back. Ballard was sacked for daring to insist that previously agreed health and safety conditions were enforced. Eighty-two of the 107 face additional fines of \$6600 each for violating an Australian Building and Construction Commission ban on industrial action on the rail line.

This is more proof that John Howard and his government are hell bent on eradicating workers' rights, and destroying trade unions' ability to defend and extend those rights.

These charges, laid on June 5, follow months of harassment and intimidation of workers involved in the dispute, including interrogations by the ABCC, which under Howard's new laws, are as secret as anti-terrorism trials. The remaining 296 workers who stopped work in February still face the prospect of being charged.

Since its formation last year, the ABCC has been targeting workers and unions who have taken industrial action over occupational health and safety concerns, in particular, including life-threatening workplace issues.

The Socialist Alliance stands 100% in solidarity with the WA construction workers and their strike action, and with the CFMEU's fight to defend its members and defeat the government's anti-union laws. The only means working people have to protect ourselves against corporations' constant drive for greater profits is to stand together and take collective action in our own defence. The right to strike is our ultimate defence against ever-lower wages, longer working hours, and more deaths and injuries on the job.

That fundamental right is now being exercised by the 18 crew onboard the *Stolt Australia*, docked in Hobart. The seafarers' decision to take industrial action to protect their jobs and working conditions against the shipping bosses' efforts to substantially reduce wages and conditions by employing non-Australian crews is completely justified. Yet, under Howard's IR regime, these workers are likely to be charged, fined - and possibly jailed - for their action.

Howard and his corporate mates are trying to abolish the right to strike altogether, passing laws that impose huge fines and jail terms on workers and unions who take any sort of industrial action, no matter what the reason. They aim to intimidate union members, bankrupt and split unions, and destroy all workplace collectivity. They must be stopped before it is too late.

Bad laws were meant to be broken. If the Howard government gets away with this assault on the WA construction workers, no worker in Australia will be secure. And if the trade union movement as a whole does not fight it, including with industrial action when necessary, no union will survive.

The Socialist Alliance calls on all those in the community who support working people's fundamental right to decent wages and working conditions to speak out against this unprecedented assault on workers' democratic rights, and to take action in solidarity with any worker and trade union, in any state or territory, that comes under attack.

## Call to SA members: Join the campaign to defend the right to strike

*By Sue Bolton, SA national trade union coordinator & Tim Gooden, SA national executive member & secretary Geelong Trades Hall*

July 12, 2006

Dear comrades,

Last week the Howard government launched what could be a decisive assault on the union movement and workers' rights with its attack – via the Australian Building and Construction Commission – on the CFMEU members who took industrial action on the Perth to Mandurah rail line project in February.

Unless there is an effective trade union and broader community response in defence of these workers' right to strike, the government and bosses will have a green light to go for broke against all militant unions and union members' right to take collective industrial action. This may be the "watershed" dispute we have all been anticipating.

The CFMEU has not yet decided on its response in WA or nationally. In the absence of a clear lead from the CFMEU as yet, it is vital that all those who recognise the importance of this particular dispute and want to fight it are able to express that. A strong indication from rank-and-file workers and the broader community of the desire to resist this assault will give more confidence to the CFMEU, and other union leaderships, to take the fight on, and will make a real difference to the outcomes.

Over the coming weeks, all Socialist Alliance members can play a role in generating momentum for a serious national campaign by:

- 1. Moving a solidarity motion in as many workplaces union meetings and other organizations as possible.**

There is a model motion on the website (<http://www.socialist-alliance.org>) for use in those unions that might take industrial action in defence of the WA workers, and which can be modified for in unions where industrial action is unlikely and in student unions, community organisations, other campaign groups, etc.

All Socialist Alliance union members need to find a way to get a motion put to members/delegates' meetings as soon as possible – directly by you and/or by your delegate, or whoever else is willing to do so. SA members who are not in a trade union need to think about other organisations they are involved in where the motion could be put.

The motion should also be widely circulated by SA members to other unionists and activists, with strong encouragement to use it.

**2. Circulating widely and collecting signatures on the petition** (available at <http://www.socialist-alliance.org>) – on street stalls, at all campaign meetings you attend, on campuses and schools, in your workplace and neighbourhood, and so on. We need to rapidly collect - and involve others in collecting - thousands of signatures for the petition to be effective. Using it will also help us get the word out about this attack, and its significance for the union movement and workers as a whole.

A Socialist Alliance statement about this attack is available on the SA website (see above), and further information can be found at <http://www.greenleft.org.au> or by contacting [sue\\_bolton@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_bolton@hotmail.com)

We urge all Socialist Alliance members to do everything you can to help build this campaign. All workers' right to strike – and thereby defend wages and working conditions, and many democratic and social rights – is at stake.

## 300,000 march for workers' rights

*The following reports from Socialist Alliance members around the country give a flavour of the June 28 national protest actions against Work Choices.*

Karen Fletcher reports that between 80,000 (police estimate) and 150,000 (Trades Hall estimate) workers gridlocked central Melbourne converging from four rally points at the city's edge, for the June 28 demonstration against Work Choices.

The turnout was smaller than the quarter of a million-strong march last November 15. Six months after the passing of Work Choices, the mood has changed. School holidays, a downturn in the building industry and a lacklustre approach to building the rally by many state public sector union leaderships who have assured their members they will be protected by Bracks' Labor Government, contributed, as did Australia Post, Visy and Nestle, which took legal action to threaten workers with the sack for participating.

Rather than the tens of thousands of teachers, nurses, manufacturing and building workers, who formed the organised core of November 15, a large proportion of the June 28 crowd were individuals and families with hand painted signs and raw concern for the future.

There was little talk from the officials of organising to resist the laws, refuse to pay fines and face the consequences united as ACTU Secretary Greg Combet had promised last November. Instead, the crowd listened restively as Bracks intoned the phrase "working families" eight times and Kim Beazley boomed about "patriotism", "ordinary Australians" and the next federal elections.

In pubs and workplaces afterwards recovering protesters were heard to complain about the barefaced electioneering. "I didn't realise I was going to an ALP election rally", one workmate told me later. "I feel used."

While grassroots unionists were supplanted by politicians on the official platform, many did speak as their contingents gathered at the four rallying points — State Parliament, Trades Hall, Southern Cross Station and Federation Square. Victorian Secretary of the Communication Workers' Union, Joan Doyle, called for active resistance by unions at Southern Cross Station, and led a vociferous contingent of postal workers behind a banner proclaiming: "Today we Unite. Tomorrow we Strike".

Former Hunters and Collectors lead singer Mark Seymour and the cast of Melbourne Workers' Theatre production *We Built This City* were a bright spot in the official proceedings with their rendition of *Touch One, Touch All*, and their dire warning that "the bluebloods are on the attack".

Uniting Church minister Sue Gorman struck a chord when she emphasised that "this is bigger than politics, we are talking about human beings", describing the misery church workers are encountering with "single mothers forced to work weekends, and the poorest of the poor getting poorer".

Well received, also, were five workers who have felt the sharp end of Work Choices among them: Karen Palmer, sacked on her return from sick leave after 14 years' work for a manufacturing firm; Brodene Wardley, interrogated by the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC) star chamber and forced to answer questions about her role as building site Health and Safety delegate under threat of six months' jail; and Arthur Redmond, one of 28 technicians retrenched by Optus then offered contracts for \$180 per week less take-home pay.

Caitlin Crozier, one of 36 workers in Channel 7's captioning department who were sacked last week for "operational reasons", received applause for her observations about the sackings. These took place after the department was centralised in Melbourne and many workers had relocated from all around the country. The network's CEO "said it was a business decision", she said, "and nothing personal. But to us, let me tell you, it's personal!"

Sue Bull reports from Geelong that 10,000-15,000 protesters marched behind a banner that read, "Better to fight on our feet, than our kids live on their knees". Children led the rally, as a symbol of the next generation who will be hit hardest by Work Choices.

Contingents arrived from three directions — the largest, from Trades Hall, was led by construction workers, another from the hospital was led by nurses and health workers and the third, from TAFE, was led by students and teachers.

Trades Hall secretary Tim Gooden read out a list of 10 "people's demands" (see full list below). Rally goers enthusiastically declared they would not vote for anyone who does not commit to the people's demands.

Gooden also derided one of Geelong's biggest employers, ALCOA, which tried to stop its employees from attending the rally, raising his hand with his middle finger extended in the air. The rally followed suit.

More than 20,000 people mobilised in Blacktown, in Sydney's western suburbs, report Liam Mitchell and Susan Price. The venue was chosen as part of the Unions NSW's marginal seats campaign.

Speakers included a truck driver who had recently been involved in a dispute with Tooheys and Linfox, which had taken over the Tooheys delivery contract. He told of how drivers had been informed they would have to pay for the upgrade of their trucks in a deal that would have meant a 42% wage cut. The dispute was resolved just before the rally.

The rally marched through Blacktown city and back to the Showgrounds. Larger than even the officials anticipated, the march had to be stopped from colliding with the tail as it left the Showgrounds. Sizable contingents came from the Fire Brigades Employees Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the National Union of Workers, the Teachers' Federation and the Australian Services Union. The NUW and AMWU bussed in from work sites all over Sydney.

Having decided not to hold a simultaneous rally in the city, which would have guaranteed even larger numbers, Unions NSW was under pressure to ensure the rally was well attended. A Unions NSW organiser was seconded to the NUW, and organisers from a range of unions formed a western Sydney regional group to prepare. The local mayor and council also supported the rally.

More than 700 joined the protest in Lismore organised by the Northern Rivers Unionists Network (NRUN) reports Bernie Wunsch. NRUN has been organising against the laws since early 2005. Chants of "Shame, Spotlight, Shame" echoed through the streets as the march went past the company now notorious for its rotten AWAs. Considering very few workplaces organised a stop-work, NRUN was happy with the turnout.

NSW Teachers federation organiser Dorothy Redfern told Green Left Weekly that it was easier for the NSWTF to organise a morning stop-work for teachers and explained that many of the 1500 workers who attended the 9am protest at Tweed Heads were teachers who had organised a stop-work before school started.

Socialist Alliance member Nick Fredman received a rousing cheer when he challenged Beazley to not only abolish AWAs but to also end the "outrageous harassment of building workers, the attacks on the right of entry and the right to organise".

Up to 20,000 workers rallied in Brisbane's Southbank, reports Mike Byrne. Queensland Council of Unions secretary Grace Grace told the crowd that employers who wanted to remain competitive would have to use the new laws whether they wanted to or not. At the Roma Street Parklands, ACTU national secretary Greg Combet focused his remarks on the next federal election, saying it would be won or lost in Queensland, and that the marginal seats campaign was critical to Labor's success. There was no alternative strategy of how to fight Work Choices put.

The Rockhampton rally attracted 2500 workers, Townsville and Gladstone 3000 and Mackay 2000. Gregory Martin reports that more than 2000 people rallied at the Gold Coast's Pratton Park. A large contingent of building workers defied threats of fines to join the early morning rally which became a sea of union flags including from the Builder Laborers' Federation (BLF), Electrical Trades Union, Transport Workers Union, CFMEU, and AMWU.

Howard and his gang of bullies have "declared war on the working people of Australia and organised labour", Dick Williams, Queensland ETU state secretary told the crowd. He said Work Choices was based on lies that even the government's own secret industrial relations department, the Office of Employment Advocate, has exposed. He said that as "vulnerable workers are being exploited, Howard, Costello and Andrews were granting themselves wage increases". Rugby League legend Tommy Raudoniki spoke out strongly against the laws, as did Greg Simcoe, state secretary of the BLF. Several Labor MPs and candidates also attended. A motion to step up the campaign against the laws put by Dan Fennelly, a BLF organiser, was passed unanimously.

Despite heavy rain in Cairns, more than 500 people protested. James Cook University students were well represented. Ken Cotterill reports that Tim Brunero from Big Brother described the Howard government as the "meanest and grubbiest" in Australian history. Also speaking was the federal Labor candidate for Leichhardt, Jim Turnour and Kevin O'Sullivan, Cairns Regional Council of Unions secretary.

Ron Perkins reports from Perth that the mood at the 12,000-strong rally, vindicated the decision of four blue-collar unions to organise the protest despite Unions WA's refusal. The unions organising the protest were the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), the Maritime Union of Australia and Communication, Electrical and Plumbing Union-Electrical Trades Union.

Large contingents of construction workers walked off building sites despite the threat of \$22,000 fines. Two of the Leighton-Kumagai Perth to Mandurah rail sites closed as did a number of Multiplex sites. The MUA bussed in members from Fremantle and Rockingham, and there were big contingents of AMWU and ETU members.

CPSU-CSA and the State School Teachers Union, which had previously not supported the rally, sent organised contingents. The Socialist Alliance, Greens WA and the socialist youth organisation Resistance, which brought a contingent of young workers and a vocal contingent from Rockingham high school, also took part.

CFMEU secretary Kevin Reynolds called for the scrapping of Work Choices and the abolition of AWAs. AMWU secretary Jock Ferguson declared, "[Together] we will get rid of these filthy stinking industrial laws". MUA state secretary Chris Cain addressed the increasing use of guest workers by unscrupulous employers. Cain said workers

needed to see guest workers as victims of Work Choices legislation, explaining that the laws had made it easier for bosses to undermine working conditions. All the speakers called for national protests to continue.

Chris Cain reported that 300 blue-collar workers rallied in Port Hedland and 600 in Karratha in the far north of WA.

Sandy Whelan reports from Adelaide that the week of action in kicked off on June 26 when up to 800 delegates packed into the Town Hall to hear Greg Combet and SA Unions Secretary Janet Giles. The largest contingents were from the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union (LHMU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU).

Combet stressed that workers need rights, not charity. "We're in a battle for the future of Australian democracy", he said to applause. Combet's plan to get the laws repealed was focused on the next federal elections, specifically three SA marginal seats. Giles urged delegates to get involved in local Workers' Defence Committees. The call for another national protest in November brought cheers.

On June 28, a picket outside Liberal MP Kym Richardson's office in Noarlunga, attracted 500 people. The 10am picket outside MP Trish Draper's office drew 600 people, while the noon rally in Salisbury, north of Adelaide had 800.

Despite attempts to stop workers from going, the rally at Victoria Square drew between 5000-10,000 people, a mix of blue- and white-collar workers. The National Union of Workers (NUW) and the CFMEU were among the biggest contingents. Construction sites across the Adelaide CBD were silent during lunchtime.

Joe Camillo, AMWU state secretary, chaired the rally, which was addressed by Labor's Penny Wong and Michael Wright, the state's IR minister. Resistance speaker Emma Murphy was well received by the many students and young workers when she said, "This is a political fight, and we're going to take the power where and when we can". Martin O'Malley from the CFMEU warned that if the building industry task force targeted one worker, "they'll be taking on the whole union", and if any union was targeted under the new laws "they'll be taking on the whole labor movement".

Will Williams reports from Wollongong that 6000 people marched and in Newcastle, Peter Robson reports that 4000 people joined the rally. Speakers at the Newcastle rally included Catholic Bishop Michael Malone and Trades Hall secretary Gary Kennedy. Thousands also protested in Launceston and Hobart.

Jo Hunt reports that around 100 people gathered outside the ACT Legislative Assembly in Canberra before marching to the office of Liberal Senator Gary Humphries. Rally organiser and Australian Services Union representative David Livingstone said the Work Choices had "put our industrial relations system back 150 years", and called on the ACT Labor government to "continue to support us". Ambrose Andrews reports that about 180 people gathered at ANU for a lunch time protest called by the ANU branch of the NTEU. Speakers included Labor Senator Kate Lundy; Derrick Corrigan, ACT NTEU branch president; Peter Malone, Unions ACT secretary; sociology professor Andrew Hopkins; Rachel Allen from ANU Labor Left students; and Neil Mudford, the NTEU ACT division secretary, who said "Labor's on side now, but they've got to be kept moving".

Around 120 people protested at Queanbeyan Park, reports Paul Oboohov. Speakers included Stephen Curran from the organising group EMPOWER (Eden-Monaro People Only Wanting Employment Rights), Kate Lundy and NSW ALP MP Steve Whan. Curran outlined an AWA for the local National Party MP, Gary Nairn, that would only pay him for the time he sat in parliament, and would require him to seek other employment at other times, as well as doing away with his traveling allowance and his parliamentary superannuation.

Anne Fariday, a life member of the LHMU in Goulburn reports that 1000 joined a local protest against Work Choices (out of a city population of only 22 000). The rally was addressed by Kate Lundy, Labor member of the ACT local government and John Kaye, Greens upper-house candidate for the forthcoming NSW election.

Geoff Lawler, secretary of the Wagga Wagga TLC reports that there were 800 people at the Wagga rally, which was addressed by Lee Rhiannon from the Greens. Also a nurse, Anne Haywood, who was recently sacked from the nearby Kapooka army barracks. Lawler was very pleased with the turn-out, and said that there was a lot of energy.

## The people's demands

*The following "People's demands" were adopted unanimously by Geelong Trades Hall Council on June 27, 2006, then adopted by acclamation at the June 28 protest rally in Geelong against Work Choices.*

Over the past 10 years the Howard Government has systematically destroyed our Conciliation and Arbitration system, and along with it, our awards, entitlements and rights in the workplace. We have allowed them to turn back the clock more than 150 years. Our rights as workers are back where they were in the early 1800's - the only thing now missing is a Master - Servants Act.

In this land of plenty, we should now be asking ourselves, is this kind of society we want to hand on to the next generation.

All would now recognise that, sadly, there is little difference between the major political parties, - all seem intent on serving corporate global interests to the detriment of ordinary working Australians.

It's time for the Australian people to set a new agenda. Let's claim back our rights.

We suggest the following 'Peoples Demands' as the minimum to start this process.

### 1. NATIONAL AWARDS TO BE ESTABLISHED FOR EVERY OCCUPATION

In Victoria we had State Awards from the 1880's until the 1990's, - when the Kennett Government opted out of the state system. We've had Federal Awards since 1904. Whilst the Award system was not a panacea for all, - it did establish basic pay and working conditions for all.

### 2. ABOLITION OF AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACE AGREEMENTS (AWA.s)

The imposition of individual employee contracts is abhorrent and unacceptable. To suggest that a 16-year-old can 'bargain' their terms and conditions of employment with a multi-national or large corporation is absurd. As all who are on AWA.s know, such contracts are presented for their signature on a 'take it or leave it' basis. Such a system can only result in longer working hours, less pay, - and less rights. Every Australian worker must have a right to basic 'Award' pay and conditions. We note that Howard's Government has retained the 'Remuneration Tribunal', so that politicians will receive regular pay increases. No question here of the politicians entering into an A.W.A. with their employer - the Australian people. What hypocrites they are.

### 3. UNJUST AND UNFAIR DISMISSAL PROVISIONS TO APPLY TO ALL.

In Victoria, prior to 1996, a 'Board of Reference' dealt with unjust & unfair dismissal cases. Cases were dealt with efficiently and quickly, - incurring no legal costs for either party. There is no valid reason why such boards cannot be re-established. Every employee, who is wrongfully dismissed, should have a right to such a process. It should be a right of all.

### 4. RIGHT OF EMPLOYEES TO BE REPRESENTED IN THE WORKPLACE.

For the past 10 years the Howard Government has been changing I.R. laws, - in order to restrict or exclude union officials from the workplace. No restrictions, of course, are placed on employers. Employers may seek advice or visits from employer organisations any time they wish. Under Howard workers have no such rights. The right to representation is a fundamental right and should be available to all employees. Union officials should have a 'Right of Entry' to consult employees any time work is taking place.

### 5. ABOLITION OF HOWARD'S BUILDING INDUSTRY 'GESTAPO' (ABCC)

The existence of Howard's building industry 'Gestapo' - the A.B.C.C. is an offence to all. Under the intimidatory powers of the A.B.C.C. workers have less rights than accused criminals. That such a force exists in a country that boasts of its democracy and freedoms is deplorable. It must be disbanded immediately.

### 6. THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVELY BARGAIN INDUSTRY AGREEMENTS.

For many years we had the right to collectively bargain 'Industry Agreements' with large corporate employers. Such agreements provide the only way for employees of large corporations to receive a little of the immense wealth often generated by such corporations.

### 7. END THE EXPLOITATION OF GUEST WORKERS AND REFUGEES

The federal government has relaxed the controls of 457 visas. This allows employers to bring in skilled and unskilled labour instead of recruiting workers from within Australia. Guest workers have no ability to access welfare, Health or other services in Australia and are employed on lower pay and conditions. These workers are under continuous threat of deportation as they raise any safety or wage issues and are therefore placed in a situation that is open to exploitation. To address any skill shortages that may arise from time to time the Government and companies should properly fund public technical colleges and increase the number of apprentices employed. We demand that all persons working in Australia, must be entitled to, - and must be paid, minimum Award rates of pay.

### 8. IMMEDIATE INCREASE IN EMPLOYED TRAINING FOR OUR YOUNG.

There are plenty of young people in Australia willing and able, to be trained for all our future needs, - if given the means and opportunity. Companies operating in Australia should be required to provide such training, - instead of shirking their responsibility, and always looking for the 'cheap' way out.

### 9. INDEPENDENT INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES RESOLUTION COMMISSION.

Such a Commission to be founded on the objectives of the original 1904 Conciliation and Arbitration Act - i.e.- To encourage the organisation of representative bodies of employers and employees (Unions). To encourage and provide means for, conciliation with a view to amicable agreement, thereby preventing and settling industrial disputes. Whilst again, not a panacea for all, it would provide for some semblance of 'fairness', and a means of settling disputes, other than belting each other over the head.

### 10. PEOPLE'S DECLARATION

We declare that we will not vote for any political candidate, who does not commit totally,  
To supporting and implementing these fundamental and minimum - peoples demands."

## 'Welfare-to-Work' and 'Work Choices' - two sides of the same coin

*The following call to all welfare recipients, welfare rights organisations, union members and unions to unite for justice on the national day of protest against Work Choices on June 28 was issued by the Socialist Alliance on June 3, 2006.*

Dear friends,

We are facing a major assault on all working people in Australia - paid workers, unemployed people and those who are not working due to a disability or caring responsibilities.

This assault is an enactment of the Business Council of Australia's three-part wish list: deregulation of industrial relations, tighter restrictions on welfare and cuts to top income tax rates. It's all about more money for the rich and less for the rest of us. If we don't want it to be like this, we are going to have to fight hard and stick together.

From July 1, the "Welfare-to-Work" laws will force many sole parents and disabled people into the work force. Employers will get an instant supply of desperate people who have no choice but to take the low-waged, unsafe and insecure jobs that the government's "Work Choices" laws are allowing employers to create. The result will be the

sacking of workers currently on a decent, union-negotiated wage, and their replacement by vulnerable people forced to work for 15 hours a week for just \$25 extra income (that is, for \$1.67 per hour!).

PM John Howard's industrial relations and welfare "reforms" are two sides of the same coin. If they are not resisted together they will produce a downward spiral in the living conditions of all welfare recipients and all waged workers.

The government's war on us all can be stopped, but doing so requires the welfare rights sector and the trade union movement to campaign together - create a united front against the simultaneous attacks on welfare and workplace rights.

An important opportunity to build and express this much-needed unity is on June 28, the Australian Council of Trade Unions-called national day of protest against the government's attacks on workplace rights.

It is vital that everyone on Newstart, the Disability Support Pension, Parenting Payment and every other Centrelink payment, and all those who advocate for welfare rights, join the June 28 protests. This is important not only to ensure that the protests are so large that the government will be unable to ignore them, but also to ensure that they send a clear message to the government and employers: "We will not let you divide us. We will stand up together for all people's right to a decent standard of living."

So start painting your banners and get ready to rally on June 28!

If you would like more information about the national day of protest, or materials to publicise it among your networks, please contact your local Trades and Labor Council, or visit <<<http://www.socialist-alliance.org>>>.

In solidarity,

Linda Seaborn

Member of the Council of Single Mothers and their Children, and the Health and Community Services Union.

## For a nuclear-free future and *real* solutions to climate change

*The following statement was issued by the Socialist Alliance national executive in May 2006.*

Led by PM John Howard, a growing chorus of Coalition and Labor Party politicians are urging a turn to nuclear power as the "solution" to greenhouse-gas driven climate change. They are attempting to force open the door to more uranium mining and nuclear power production in Australia.

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to the survival of humanity and the planet, but the nuclear "cure" would be as bad as the disease.

**Myth:** *Nuclear power is "greenhouse free".*

**Fact:** Huge amounts of energy are needed to construct nuclear power plants and produce nuclear fuel, generating substantial greenhouse gases.

**Myth:** *Nuclear power would reduce greenhouse gas emissions.*

**Fact 1:** To replace fossil-fuel generated electricity with nuclear power would require a five-fold increase in the number of nuclear reactors, but would reduce global greenhouse emissions by only 5-10% — nowhere near the 60% reduction required to stabilise atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases. Meanwhile, the extra 1760 reactors required would produce 2.6 million tonnes of high-level nuclear waste over a 50-year lifespan.

**Fact 2:** While emissions per unit of energy from nuclear power are about one-third of those from large gas-fired electricity plants, this comparative benefit of nuclear power is negated as higher-grade uranium ores are depleted and lower-grade ores are mined. All higher-grade ore will be depleted in 50 years at the current rate of usage.

**Fact 3:** There are many viable alternatives - geo-thermal, wind, solar and tidal power - that generate considerably less greenhouse emissions per unit energy than nuclear power. Renewable energy, mostly hydroelectricity, already supplies 19% of world electricity, compared to nuclear at 16%.

**Myth:** *Nuclear power is safe.*

**Fact 1:** An expansion of nuclear power would inevitably lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The "peaceful" nuclear power and research sectors have produced enough fissile material to build more than 110,000 nuclear weapons. Of the 60 countries that have built nuclear power or research reactors, around 25 are known to have used their "peaceful" nuclear facilities for covert weapons research and/or production. Claims that the international safeguards system prevents misuse of "peaceful" nuclear facilities and materials are grossly overstated.

**Fact 2:** With nuclear reactors comes the constant danger of catastrophic accidents, due to mechanical failures and human error. The 1986 Chernobyl accident caused an additional 200,000 deaths in Russia, the Ukraine and Belarus between 1990-2004. Since then, industry deregulation and privatisation have allowed corporations to cut corners on safety regulations and adequate staffing, increasing the chance of accidents.

**Myth:** *Nuclear waste can now be safely stored.*

**Fact 1:** There is still no safe storage system for nuclear waste. Not a single repository exists for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste, which is produced at an annual rate of about 10,000 tonnes worldwide. Technologies exist to encapsulate or immobilise radionuclides, but encapsulated radioactive waste remains a public health and environmental threat that will last for millennia.

**Fact 2:** Reprocessing spent reactor fuel is polluting, and most of the uranium and plutonium arising from reprocessing is simply stockpiled with no plans for its use.

Given the massive human and environmental risks, why is nuclear power even being considered?

The renewed push for nuclear power is being driven by greed – by the huge mining corporations' search for ever-greater profits. Australia has 30% of the world's proven uranium ore reserves. With the global demand for uranium increasing, the market price for uranium has tripled in the last two years. Between 1981-96, Australia exported an average of 3400 tonnes of uranium oxide concentrates annually. In 2004-05, exports increased to 11,215 tonnes per year. This earned the mining companies \$475 million. The number of mining companies prospecting for uranium reserves in Australia has increased from five in 2003 to more than 70 today.

The ALP must oppose the nuclear push

The ALP's current policy recognises that uranium mining presents "unprecedented hazards and risks" and advocates "no new uranium mines". This prevents the development of some of the biggest uranium deposits in states with Labor governments.

But the pressure is building on Labor to change its policy at its 2007 national conference, and a growing number of ALP leaders are indicating that they are happy to do the mining corporations' bidding. Martin Ferguson, shadow minister for primary industry, and South Australian Premier Mike Rann are leading the charge.

Uranium mining and nuclear power can be stopped – we've done it before. The only serious proposal to build a nuclear power plant in Australia — at Jervis Bay in NSW in the late 1960s — was defeated by public and political opposition. In the late 1990s, the proposed development of Jabiluka mine in the Northern Territory was halted by a concerted national and international campaign.

We call on all members of the ALP to ensure that their party does not capitulate to the mining corporations greed, and to demand that Labor close the door forever on uranium mining and nuclear power in Australia.

The Socialist Alliance joins with all those campaigning for a nuclear-free future and real solutions to climate change. We call for:

- No nuclear power plants.
- No new nuclear reactors and the immediate closure of the HIFAR reactor.
- Closure of the Ranger, Roxby Downs and Beverley uranium mines, and no new mines.
- No dumping of nuclear waste: waste producers must manage their own waste in secure, monitored facilities at their own expense.
- No new coal-fired power stations.
- More investment in clean, safe technologies and renewable energy infrastructure.
- Establishment of an industry-funded 10% renewable energy target by 2010.
- Full public ownership of all energy/electricity industries.

## Justice, not paternalism

*The following statement was issued by the Socialist Alliance's Indigenous rights spokesperson Sam Watson on June 23, 2006.*

Federal health minister Tony Abbott announced on June 21 a proposal to impose a "form of paternalism ... based on competence rather than race" on Aboriginal communities. His proposal would give "administrators" wide-ranging powers to run communities, eradicating any semblance of Indigenous self-determination.

Abbott's outburst is totally symptomatic of the Howard regime's final solution to race relations in this country. Since Howard was elected in March 1996, his corrupt and rotten government has gradually dismantled the Aboriginal political leadership, further stripped the Aboriginal nations of valuable resources and services, and continually used the Packer/Murdoch mass media to marginalise and dehumanise Aboriginal people.

Abbott argues that a "sense of guilt about the past and naive idealism of communal life may now be the biggest obstacle to the betterment of Aboriginal people". He and fellow attack dogs have made an art form out of blaming the victim.

The problem of Aboriginal disadvantage, says Abbott, "is not the lack of spending, although it could always be higher, but the culture of directionless in which so many Aboriginal people live". Yet Howard and previous federal administrations have consistently underspent on Aboriginal health, housing and education. They and their state counterparts have consistently refused to engage with Aboriginal leaders and work out an equitable and reasonable form of compensation to Aboriginal people for past injustices, such as theft of lands, destruction of cultures and stolen wages.

Abbott, Howard and their ilk refuse to acknowledge that the entire Australian economy is based on Aboriginal land. They refuse to acknowledge that white Australia owes the Aboriginal nations 218 years of back-rent and damages for illegal armed invasion and loss of life.

The pathway forward is to re-empower the traditional leadership structures and resource those remote communities to the same extent as white Australian suburban communities. Every Aboriginal child born on this land must have the same access to goods and services that every white child has.

## Minor parties to be deregistered in December

*By Lisa Macdonald, SA national office*

On June 22, the Howard government passed amendments to the federal electoral laws (called the Electoral and Referendum Amendment (Electoral Integrity and Other Measures) Act 2006) that will make it even more difficult to

challenge the major party duopoly in Canberra. The changes will impact directly on the Socialist Alliance, which is currently registered federally as a political party. In summary, the changes are:

#### 1. Closing of the electoral roll

The electoral roll will now close at 8pm on the day that a federal election is called. Previously, voters had around one week after the announcement of an election date to enrol or correct outdated enrolment details. This change will particularly affect young people (those who have turned 18 since the last election but have not got around to enrolling).

#### 2. Automatic deregistration in December

All political parties that do not currently have a member in federal parliament will be automatically deregistered on December 27, 2006. This includes the Socialist Alliance. Without registration, SA's name would not appear on the ballot papers, we would be ineligible for electoral funding and donations made to SA could no longer be claimed as a tax deduction.

The parties deregistered on December 27 can apply for re-registration after that date. If a re-registration application is received by the Australian Electoral Commission within 6 months of deregistration (ie: by June 22, 2007), the \$500 party registration fee will be waived.

Under current rules, to be re-registered, SA will have to provide the AEC with an original, signed form (provided by the AEC) from at least 500 financial SA members who are on the electoral roll at their current residential address. The AEC will send a letter to an undisclosed selection of these 500 members (previously it has been sent to about 20% of the 500 members) at the address on their form. That letter must be signed by the recipient declaring that they are a member of SA and not a member of any other electoral party, and then mailed back to the AEC by a particular date. If a certain (unspecified) number of members fail to return the AEC letter by that date the party's application is rejected.

#### 3. The next federal election

The new legislation also states that:

(i) the register of political parties has been frozen for 6 months – no new party registrations are possible and no currently registered party can be deregistered until after December 27.

(ii) if a federal election is held between now and June 22, 2007 (12 months after the new legislation was passed), all currently registered parties (including SA) will be able to exercise their party status if they contest the election.

#### 4. Tax deductible donations

The amount of donations to political parties that can be claimed as a tax deduction has been increased from \$100 to \$1500 per year, effective immediately.

#### 5. Declaration of political donations

The threshold at which donations to political parties must be declared has been increased from \$1500 to \$10,000. That is, any donation up to \$10,000 does not need to be declared to the AEC Funding & Disclosure section.

## Omission and inclusion

*By Bernie Rosen, Bankstown branch*

If we accept Lenin's characterisation of a socialist newspaper as a collective agitator, organiser and educator of the people, it will be useful to apply it to Green left Weekly. I preface my observations by saying that G.L.W. is a very good newspaper and I am not criticising its contents. My remarks revolve around its omissions.

We frequently read about the achievements in Venezuela and for socialists and those who are beginning to take an interest in socialism it is splendid news. But what percentage of Australian workers are socialist minded? Election results over the last decade indicate that a very high percentage of the working class vote Liberal and Labor; that is, for the parties that pride themselves on administering a capitalist state to please the wealthy capitalists.

#### More local news

For this reason, it is essential to publish more news concerning housing, social services of all kinds, and complaints concerning the very high interest rates on bank cards.

More space should be allocated to trade union news to supplement the splendid reports from Sue Bolton. Right-wing officials who are bosses stooges deserve to be exposed for their mendacity to their members.

#### Support growing against anti-union laws

We will win support from the Australian working class by what we can do for them. The campaign against the Work Choices Industrial Relations legislation is a very useful step forward in this direction. At the same time we must, where possible, campaign around housing, pensions, child care, taxation, provision of accommodation for the homeless, and assistance to the struggling farmers adversely affected by global capitalism, droughts, natural disasters and high bank interest rates.

#### Banking for bankers' wealth

Recently I received a letter from a bank that I have used for many years. They informed me how banking can be made much easier for me. All I have to do is to use the internet and bank online. Nothing of course appeared about the disreputable motive for this alleged generosity.

It is obvious if this method of banking is accepted by the public it would considerably decrease employment and the services that over the counter banking gives to the public. The only beneficiaries would be the shareholders. Already bank closures and internet banking has ruined many careers.

Banking and insurance should be public utilities

The Fischer Labor government established the Commonwealth Bank. The Chifley Labor government in 1947 tried to nationalise the private banks, but the High Court and the judicial committee of the Privy Council declared the legislation invalid. The Keating government privatised the Commonwealth Bank.

Banking and insurance should be public utilities and not run for the aggrandisement of wealthy shareholders.

Harmonious balance of overseas and local news

These observations are not profound, but I believe are common sense ways of coping with today's difficulties. To sum up, we should aim to get our priorities right by striking a harmonious balance between the needs and aspirations of the Australian people, and reports covering overseas events with our working class presentation and interpretation of them.

## Report on Seeing Red

*By Dick Nichols, Seeing Red managing editor*

With *Seeing Red* now in its fifth issue, it's time to evaluate the project. In this report I'm setting down my assessment as managing editor of the viability of the project. It's my personal opinion and hasn't been discussed with any other board members.

Who's involved?

### **a. Editorial Board**

As it now stands, after a recent "reshuffle", the Seeing Red Editorial Board is: Alastair Greig (Head of School, School of Social Sciences, ANU), Rosemary Webb (Lecturer in School of Arts and Social Sciences, Southern Cross University), Jamie Doughney (Senior Lecturer in Applied Economics, Victoria University), David Glanz (ISO), Pat Brewer (DSP and Lecturer at Victoria University), Kerry Klinner (graphic designer), Clinton Fernandes (Senior Lecturer, Strategic Studies, Australian Defence Forces Academy), Scott Poynting (Associate Professor, School of Cultural Inquiry/School of Humanities, University of Western Sydney) and myself as managing editor.

The addition of Pat Brewer, Clinton Fernandes and Scott Poynting has undoubtedly strengthened the board, not only because of their individual input, but because of the broader networks and knowledge they bring with them. It has also helped compensate for Humphrey McQueen's resignation from the board, even while he continues to collaborate as contributing editor.

After five issues I think it's clear that the editorial board functions well as a team and that the project has created its "patriots". Our hook-ups generate fruitful discussion about how best to tackle the issues we want to feature in the magazine, there's no problem with anyone stating their opinion as sharply as they want. Also, after five issues, the level of commitment from board members to the project is such that the editing workload I have been largely carrying will now be willingly redistributed among the other board members.

On this board, with its mixture of radical academics acquainted with "the debate" and "the literature" in their areas of expertise (but not only there), and those of us whose trajectory has been in the movements and Marxist party-politics, there's a fruitful accumulation of different experiences and knowledge. Also, where the necessary knowledge in a particular area isn't to be found on the board we usually know where to ask.

Despite these gains, there's no denying that Humphrey McQueen's decision to step back from the editorial board has been a loss, because of his extraordinary knowledge, his capacity to think creatively about the most engaging way to get across often complex ideas and his huge range of contacts in the most diverse fields (unions, academic and cultural-artistic). However, Humphrey continues to make suggestions and concrete offers of collaboration, and the hope is that this may someday lead to his return.

As things now stand the main weakness of the board remain its gender and geographical imbalance, with three women members out of nine, and nobody from Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory. In the short term we are looking to fix this problem via the Contributing Editors' list. We also have a way to go in generating a regular (say bi-weekly) circuit of communication and ongoing discussion among board members, at bottom due to my time constraints as managing editor.

### **b. Contributing Editors**

The Contributing Editors list is: Humphrey McQueen ("freelance historian"), Dick Bryan (Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Sydney), Verity Burgmann (Professor of Political Science, University of Melbourne), Max Lane (DSP, lecturer in Indonesian studies at the University of Sydney), Rob White (Professor of Sociology, University of Tasmania), Michael Stevenson (Senior lecturer in anthropology, Monash University), Phil Andrews (Lecturer in chemistry, Monash University), Tim Anderson (lecturer, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Sydney) and Richard Hil (Senior lecturer, school of social sciences, Southern Cross University).

So far we have not been able to get this category working at all, overwhelmingly been due to time pressure on myself. One idea is to use the Contributing Editors' list to integrate and make better use of the contribution of the

magazine's supporters. It's in this framework that we've also invited Jeremy Smith to become a contributing editor as well as Alex Miller.

### c. Network of supporters and contacts

We are still at the beginning of constructing the potential network of supporters and contributors that we can be pretty certain is out there for the magazine in left and radical academic milieux. So far the magazine has found supporters and distributors in: University of Queensland, Griffith University, Southern Cross University, University of New England, University of Newcastle (central coast campus), University of Sydney, University of Western Sydney, Wollongong University, University of Melbourne, Monash University, RMIT, Victoria University, University of Ballarat and the University of Tasmania. It should also be easy to spread our network to the University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, University of Canberra, Charles Sturt University, Deakin University, La Trobe University, Swinburne .

That leaves the harder places—the Southern Australian and Western Australian campuses as well as northern Queensland and the Northern Territory—as targets for the future.

In addition there are a couple of groups connected with the Socialist Alliance, notably in Brisbane and Victoria University, who have used the magazine to sponsor seminars. Also, a number of Socialist Alliance branches make a point of pushing the magazine in the spirit of its being “the organ” of Socialist Alliance.

Our experience to date is that there is a network for *Seeing Red* that is almost waiting to be created—we have only to find the sympathetic left-leaning and/or radical academics who aren't just interested in their own careers and publications (ie, are interested in reaching a wider left audience) for them to come on board the project. Again, the main constraint here is the lack of time available to pursue openings already known and discover the new ones (see section on “Potential expansion paths” below).

As far as the magazine's presence on the left goes it is now accepted as part of the left literary-intellectual scene (with *Overland*, *Dissent* and *Arena*). *Arena* has now decided to swap advertisements.

### Quality of the first five issues

*Seeing Red* is a gamble—a gamble there's potentially a large enough left and radical audience “out there”, or able to be consolidated “out there”, which is interested in serious, but approachable, non-jargonised and even humorous analysis of economy, politics, society, culture and life. Also, that while its writing is not directly about delineating concrete alternatives to neo-liberal policy, it should help stimulate thinking, “brainstorming” and criticism that can lead in that direction. That is, it has, unlike say *Arena* and *Overland*, an indirect connection with the task of elaborating alternative policy. In this it is closer to Kenneth Davidson's *Dissent*, whose underlying purpose is to defend and extend a Keynesian, Social Democratic alternative to current Laborism

Our basic method has been to search out the writers with expertise in various areas and ask them to deliver their specific contribution in as accessible and lively a way as possible. This has often taken a lot of negotiating and editing and re-editing of articles, as we ask writers to emerge from the “comfort zone” of their discipline and its existing language, audience and assumed knowledge.

How well has *Seeing Red* been able to meet this goal so far? My personal judgment is that we have started reasonably well: there's been a small minority of pieces that have won strong praise, a small minority of duds, but the majority have been solid pieces that have provoked interest and been appreciated, not by all readers, of course, but by enough.

The magazine treads a fine line, of course. The academic expert, on flicking through articles that try to popularise his or her area, will say that he or she “knows all this already”, while the social or trade union activist on reading articles not targeted at imparting information and debate useful to a particular struggle or movement, may find it all irrelevant, boring or a bit of a wank.

The touchstone for a good piece and/or issue seems to me to be one that gives a variegated audience—from the activists and party militant through to the non-active student of ideas, the essential information with which to (begin to) orient themselves in a particular area—that after reading the article they know a bit more of what we all need to know and appreciate the magazine for having made it available.

On this rough criterion I would rate the five issues as follows:

\* #1. A good start, with a lot of variety of content, look and presentation and a good contribution from a “surprising” source (Fiona Stanley's National Press Club address on child health);

\* #2 Maybe a bit too narrow, but a number of articles that readers may have found a bit formidable provide essential argument against a standard myth with which we are being berated. Worth rereading.

\* #3 The education articles (the theme of the issue) were solid but not much more, and there was a “missing article” analysing in greater depth the sort of “education” required by neo-liberalism in economics and the obsession with building competitiveness (“human capital formation”). The Venezuela articles by Marta Harnecker and Miguel Urbano Rodrigues remain useful but there were too many reprints.

\* #4 Good. A pretty thorough coverage of the Work Choices battleground (the special issue of *Journal of Australian Political Economy* doesn't add all that much on this theme although it had more detailed information), along with nice variety in the other sections. The only problem was the cover, which was too busy.

\* #5 is the most popular, given the response to date. The treatment of the ecological theme, though tackling a small range of issues, was thorough and the articles on nuclear power, Gunns and the vehicle economy are being cited around the traps. Having Levins on Cuban environmental policy is the first time we've been able to provide a “counterfactual”

to the environmental state of affairs in the capitalist world. Roger Horton's picture of life in the army adds the sort of pen picture of life today that we should aim for in each issue.

All this said, we still have a way to go to construct *Seeing Red* as a permanent site of serious discussion. As matters stand, discussion and polemic is happening under stimulus from the editorial board rather than through readers naturally reaching for their pens/keyboards. But readers will tell us their opinions on any number of pieces—the job is to get them articulated in print. This interchange will come more readily as we use the magazine to promote seminars/debates on particular themes, which is a goal of our fundraising efforts towards the middle of the year.

#### Circulation and finances

Financially, *Seeing Red* is still a long way from sustainability, and depends totally on the time devoted by Kerry Klinner (the designer) and myself. However, the circulation figures for issue #4 show an upturn in distribution.

The big difference between the profit and loss situation on a cash and accrual basis is half due to Socialist Alliance branches using *Seeing Red* income for other purposes and half due to sales shortfalls on the first three issues. How much of this debt is really collectible will be worked out soon.

The main unexplored realm for distribution remains subscriptions, especially in the universities. Our experience to date is that whenever we push the magazine in university circles, conferences or Socialist Alliance events on campus, it sells very easily.

#### Expansion paths for Seeing Red

The main immediate jobs for consolidating the magazine's financial basis are a subscriptions push and the organisation of mid-year *Seeing Red* seminars.

Another potential expansion paths lies through the web site, which has to be reconstructed, and which we hope to build along the lines of the *Monthly Review* site.

#### Conclusion

*Seeing Red* is still to reach the audience and become a consolidated site of the sort of discussion proposed in the first issue. However, the potential for achieving this goal still remains to be fully tested. With the expansion of the editorial board, I shall have time to engage more people in the project (writing, editing and distribution).

## SA's anti-war campaigning

*Following a discussion of the state of the anti-war and related campaigns nationwide, the Socialist Alliance national executive agreed at its June 25 meeting:*

1. That SA support the building of the Hiroshima Day actions in August and argue for the actions to raise both 'Troops out of Iraq' and anti-nuclear demands.
2. That SA support the September week of action against an imperialist attack on Iran, and link the 'Troops out of Iraq' demand into the actions.
3. That SA support the 'Stop Bush!' protests being planned during the APEC forum in Sydney in 2007.
4. That SA keep raising the demand for David Hicks to be brought home, and for Camp X-ray and the US military base in Guantanamo Bay to be closed.
5. That the national executive have a more detailed discussion about the anti-nuclear/anti-uranium campaign at a future meeting.

## SA's trade union and workers' rights campaigning

*The following decisions about the Socialist Alliance's union and workers' rights campaigning were adopted by the national executive on June 25.*

1. That SA push for protests at all hearings of the Australian Building and Construction Commission.
2. That SA continue to initiate and support community pickets targeting bosses who are implementing AWAs and other aspects of the Work Choices laws.
3. That the national Trade Union Coordinating Committee and the national executive discuss at their next meetings, in light of the June 28 mobilisations, possible next steps in the campaign before the next ACTU-scheduled national actions in November.

## New Socialist Alliance e-newsletter

At its May meeting, the Socialist Alliance national executive agreed to produce a regular national e-newsletter (an email newsletter) for distribution to Socialist Alliance members nationwide. The aim of the newsletter is to keep SA members better informed about the month to month activities of the Alliance's branches and working groups.

The first issue of the e-newsletter was produced in June, and another will be distributed this month. If you have email access and did not receive the first issue, please contact Lisa at [national\\_office@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:national_office@socialist-alliance.org) or on (02) 9690 2508, or contact your local branch direct.

## Join a Socialist Alliance campaign e-list

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

**Civil liberties/democratic rights:** [sademocraticrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:sademocraticrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

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

**Justice for Indigenous people:** [saindigrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:saindigrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

**Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex rights:** [sasexualityrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:sasexualityrights-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

**Refugee rights:** [sarefugee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:sarefugee-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

**Anti-war:** [sa\\_anti-war-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:sa_anti-war-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

**Welfare issues:** [sa\\_social\\_justice-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:sa_social_justice-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

**Green Left Weekly content:** [saglw\\_copy-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:saglw_copy-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

**Trade unions:** There are a range of national e-lists for members of particular trade unions. For more information about the union e-lists, contact: [national\\_office@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:national_office@socialist-alliance.org)