

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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

Two individualisms

By Craig Hall (Wills branch)

Liberal ideology attempts to imbue us all with a diffuse consciousness. This diffuseness is centred in appeals to individuality, leading to alienation and isolation, with all of the attendant nasties like sexism, racism, homophobia, chauvinism, etc.

Opposed to this is class-consciousness, which is a sharp weapon in our fight in the belly of one of the many Imperialist beasts. It is also a set of understandings that give clear direction, especially for Marxists

With this, it is interesting that Liberalism overtly pushes individualism as the cornerstone of how we are expected to act under capitalism. At the other end, socialist organisations seemingly emphasise the collective as the vehicle for change.

While the autonomy of the individual is seen as sacrosanct under Late Imperialism, the contradiction that is attendant to this ideology is corruption, theft, and thirst for dominance. This negative individualism is salient, and it is reflected in such public pronouncements as that which Margaret Thatcher stated in the 1980s where she observed that there was no community, just a market of individuals.

As far back as 1776, the political economist, Adam Smith - Karl Marx critiqued him in *Critique of Political Economy*, more popularly known as *Das Capital* - published *Wealth of Nations*, which was his contribution to modern political/economic ideology. He railed against large government and promoted "enlightened self interest" to guide capitalism into a new phase of its development. This was on the cusp of the Industrial Revolution which allowed Britain in the 19th century to internationalise globally its economy where "the sun never set on the empire".

The trouble is that the "enlightened" part of "enlightened self interest" was dropped, or just never taken up by those honest Captains of Industry that Marx exposed in *Das Capital* as thieves. It is naked self interest!

Opposed to this is the individualism inherent in the Marxist organisation. This may sound strange, but if we look at the organisation, politics, and education of cadre within the group we observe Individual members learning to take up responsibility for running things.

As the time spent in the political and organisation structure goes on, the individual members mature as skills are learnt, facilitated by more experienced members. This is indispensable to the organisation.

From here it can be seen that there is a paradox within the Marxist structure, where positive individualism grows, whilst each individual adheres to the collective democracy of running the party.

Any socialist organisation worth its salt respects the individual members within its structure, and educates them in the myriad activities in the organisation. As well as this there is guidance given to members intervening in the wider mass movements.

From here a Party is strengthened, and in the case of the United Front of the Socialist Alliance, it is apparent that individuals are not swamped by the Alliance organisation.

There is a tension between individuals and the collective. Dialectically they both benefit. This has put to rest the right-wing argument that Marxists are mindless sheep. What strengthened this criticism was the Parties of Stalinism throughout the world which were certainly undemocratic, centralist organisations.

Finally, leadership of socialist organisations are enhanced by the positive individualism described, as long as the individual recognises that they are responsible to the organisation of affiliates, and more generally, the Socialist Alliance. This must be based on political principle, and with a sense of democratic inclusiveness.

Lessons of the Melbourne council election success

By David Glanz (national co-convenor)

The general outlines of the Socialist Alliance's success in the election for Moreland Council in Melbourne have been described elsewhere. Reports have been carried in at least three of the publications which support the Alliance: *Socialist Worker* (<http://www.iso.org.au/socialistworker/543/p6b.html>), the *Freedom Socialist Bulletin*, and *Green Left Weekly*. You can also find a report in the February issue of *Seeing Red*.

There are, however, some lessons to be drawn that are relevant to the continuing debate about how best to build the Socialist Alliance.

The election success was the work of Wills branch. Wills branch is in many ways different from most other branches. It does not operate according to the formula that the Democratic Socialist Perspective says is the key to success. For example:

- It meets monthly, not fortnightly.
- It engages in local campaigns and citywide campaigns, but does not pretend to be the centre of all activity for Socialist Alliance members.
- It does not run weekly street stalls (organising stalls only for special events and campaigns) and it does not sell or fund-raise for *Green Left Weekly* (or any other affiliate publication).
- It does not spend its funds on offices.
- It mails a monthly newsletter to members along with regular emails.

- It has contested six elections in four years, during which it has had noticeable success in fundraising and in mobilising members, and in recruitment.

It is, however, one of the largest branches in the country, with 98 members.

An important factor in Wills' success is that it has concentrated its resources on local activity and election campaigns.

This is the complete opposite of the mistaken tactics being employed in the WA state elections, where the Alliance is standing in upper house seats spread across a large geographical area.

The first approach, in Wills, flows from seeing the need to build the Alliance as a practical, locally connected alternative to Labor, which links the big questions of politics to local concerns. The second approach is a passive propagandist one, that sees elections as an exercise in gaining support for socialist principles in the abstract, separated from sustained, practical engagement with the struggles or issues in the local area.

The second feature of the branch's success is that it has roots in the community, which pre-date the Alliance and which are the work of both affiliates and individual members. Alliance members have driven out the Nazis, run campaigns against factory closures and public sector staffing cuts, organised the local peace group, led the union in local workplaces, convinced the council to make Moreland a "Hanson-free zone", organised against the sexist Blackshirts, and much more.

More recently, the branch organised a workday lunchtime rally of 50 workers and residents outside the local Centrelink over staffing shortages. It also organised the only protest over the closure of the Kodak plant.

Some DSP members of the Socialist Alliance national executive have tried to explain Wills' success in building roots in terms of regular stalls.

Stalls can be useful to gain profile when they have a specific purpose – relating to a particular campaign or at election time – but building real roots in the local community requires much more.

Any branch that thinks that setting up a card table on a Saturday morning is, by itself, going to bring success would be fooling itself.

The Alliance has to be relevant and useful to local residents who want real solutions and action around points of concern, not just good ideas. We need to prove that we are, within the limits of our size and resources, a practical as well as a political alternative for disaffected Labor and Greens supporters.

Interesting forums and stalls can play a part but involvement in the local community plays an even larger one. The success of the Socialist Party in Yarra Council in Melbourne, where Steve Jolly was elected, underlines the general point.

The DSP has put a lot of resources into the Socialist Alliance and I am sure it wants to see vibrant, campaigning branches which are rooted in the local community. Yet its current formula for building the Alliance, which is very similar to the way the DSP used to build itself, has shown itself to be a less than satisfactory strategy.

These are sharp words and will not be welcomed by some Alliance members. But it is necessary to speak honestly. Too many branches that have been run according to the DSP formula have stagnated or gone backward: Melbourne North-East, Melbourne Central, Sydney Northside, Sydney Central and Sydney Eastern Suburbs, to name just five. Wills has not.

I know that many non-aligned and DSP members understand the need to be engaged in building roots in the local community. DSP members have played an excellent role in responding to events surrounding the riot in Redfern and the death of TJ Hickey. The Bankstown branch has done great work in building the local peace group and relating to the Free Hicks and Habib campaign. We need to generalise these success stories. Yet the DSP's formula does not prioritise this essential local work.

I do not pretend to have all the answers. How the Alliance grows during the Liberals' fourth term is something we must work out through collective discussion and experience. But clearly the success of Wills branch holds many valuable lessons in how to build vibrant and relevant branches.

Let's learn from our experience.

Some lines in the sand

By Lisa Macdonald (National Co-convenor & Sydney West branch)

With the Socialist Alliance national conference just three months away, David Glanz's contribution in this issue of Alliance Voices, including his "sharp words" are welcome because they put the International Socialist Organisation's cards on the table and open up a necessary debate about the way forward for Socialist Alliance. It is a debate that will frame the important decisions members need to make at the national conference if the Alliance is to progress.

What is not so welcome in David's contribution are the distortions of fact, and the fudging of the real issues confronting all of us who are working hard to strengthen left unity in Australia, and make the Alliance the most effective organization it can be in Australian politics today.

The members of those branches that David names as having "stagnated or gone backwards" can tell the truth for themselves. But as someone who is privileged, because of my work in the SA national office, to have very regular contact with a wide variety of members and branches nationwide, I can say confidently that the basic premise of David's article is wrong - there is no "model" for building the SA successfully everywhere, neither a Wills "success" model, not a "failed DSP formula".

Branches all around the country have experimented with different ways of organising over the last three and a half years, and all branches have strengths and weaknesses, reflecting the diversity of the membership, and differences in the amount of activist resources and local conditions. Some branches meet fortnightly, others monthly. Some have frequently meeting branch committees, others do almost all their business through the full branch meetings instead. Some have had plenty of local campaign openings to relate to, others have had relatively few. Some have regular branch newsletters, others regularly phone members.

Contrary to David's implication, most branches have been very engaged in "local campaigns" - not just Bankstown branch in the Hicks and Habib campaign and Sydney Central branch in the TJ Hickey campaign, but also the "Save Our Rail" campaign in Newcastle and that branch's building of a mass campaign to stop fascists attacks on the local Sudanese community, the Sandon Point campaign in Wollongong, the anti-police violence campaign in Melbourne West, the Northern Rivers branch's organization of a progressive unionists network in northern NSW, the anti-oil storage campaign in Darwin harbour, and Geelong branch's leadership of just about every community struggle in that town. This is not an exhaustive list, but in every case DSP members - apparently despite the supposed "DSP model of branch building" - have been centrally involved, side by side with non-aligned members.

But David's crude appeal to "local versus national" (it is often a matter of semantics as to whether "local campaigns" are really local, or are state and/or national concerns, aspects of which are organised at the local level), along with his emphasis on electoralism and a minimalist approach to SA building ("not pretend to be the centre of all activity for SA members"), in fact tells the real story. That is that the ISO does not support - in theory or practice - the project, supported by a large majority of delegates at the last two national conferences, of building SA as an increasingly united, democratic, active and effective multi-tendency socialist organization. To the extent that the ISO and the DSP have different "models" of SA building, this is the fundamental difference.

Holding and arguing for a minority view within SA on what the Alliance could and should become is the ISO's right - as it is the right of any SA affiliate to refuse to become a tendency within SA, to not make SA the *principle* party they build. But it is disingenuous to then argue that a model of branch building (Wills) that is premised on *not* throwing your all into SA is the best model for advancing the Socialist Alliance. The Wills model is, in fact, tailored to enable the smaller affiliates whose members are highly concentrated in that one branch (ISO, Workers Liberty, Freedom Socialist Party, Workers Power) to build SA in a way which does not encroach on their ability to build, first and foremost, their own revolutionary parties.

This is revealed starkly if you ask yourself one question: If all SA branches and members around the country operated according to the Wills model that David describes, what would the Socialist Alliance be today?

It is possible that it might have more members on paper, but it is more likely that there would simply be bigger but fewer branches because the DSP would have 95% of its members in a single branch in each city, rather than working alongside non-aligned members who are spread across many suburbs in every city. Certainly, SA would have little or no presence in many outer suburbs where the majority of the working class live (such as my own branch in Sydney's west). And SA's local community campaigning, which David puts so much emphasis on, would be significantly *less* than it has been with many branches working in diverse areas.

I have no doubt that if the DSP had concentrated all its members into one branch in each city, it and the non-aligned members in that one branch could have run equally intensive and successful local government election campaigns, especially if we contested councils in historically left-leaning areas like Moreland. But if all SA members had "concentrated [their] resources on local activity and election campaigns", as David advocates, SA would have been completely unable to carry out some of its most important work - taking responsibility and some leadership in crucial spheres of resistance against Howard's attacks on the working class.

SA's modest but undeniably important role in rebuilding a militant trade union network in Australia would not be a priority in the ISO's localist, minimalist and electoralist model. In the face of the most vicious anti-union offensive in decades, SA would not, for example, have initiated - and last week succeeded in Victoria - in getting trade union leaderships to call mass cross-union delegate meetings. Nor would it have launched a uniting, fight-back sign-on statement (which is now gathering momentum with key union leaders signing on). Nor would building a mass campaign to defend our comrade Craig Johnston have been possible. Nor would it be able to organise the national trade union fight-back conference in Melbourne in June. Certainly, these projects divert considerable SA activists' energy from local issue work and council election campaigns, but they are essential to realise any hopes of stopping Howard's attacks on workers everywhere.

If the ISO model was generalised nationwide, SA probably would not taken the national or citywide initiatives in the antiwar campaign that have kept the majority public opposition to Australia's involvement in the war on Iraq in the public eye.

If the ISO model was generalised SA would have given up the profile, respect and political authority amongst the thousands of *Green Left Weekly* readers that it has gained through its weekly column, "Our Common Cause", and the many articles written by SA members organised through the SA-GLW copy list. In fact, the Alliance would have no special relationship with *Green Left Weekly* at all.

If the ISO model was generalised SA would simply not have been able to produce its wonderful magazine Seeing Red, which is dependent on the commitment and hard work of an editorial board drawn from around the country, and who are able to do the great job they are doing because of the almost full-time administrative load taken by a DSP-funded managing editor.

If Wills branch practice was generalised nationwide the Alliance would not have even been able to fund the discussions and work done by telephone hook-up of the various national coordination and elected leadership bodies, nor could it have produced *Alliance Voices* or *Socialist Campaigner*, nor maintained a national web site. That is because, despite quite a few Wills branch members being on national decision-making bodies (as automatic affiliate representatives), Wills branch, unlike the majority of other branches, has not contributed a cent in the national pledge system that the National Executive introduced to cover such national operating costs. On a financial basis alone, David's model branch simply would not work if it were not for significant subsidisation by the DSP and by other local branches outside of Victoria (figures on all branches' financial contribution are available to members upon request).

Local issue and election campaigning is valuable work for SA – I do not dispute that. But the national work of the Alliance, including all that outlined above, is very important because it can enable SA to have an influence on broader class-struggle politics that is greater than our present small size, geographic spread and resources. That this *is* actually understood by the ISO is evident in the fact that, in Sydney at least, the ISO members intervene in all local antiwar movement meetings and activities, not in the name of Socialist Alliance, but as public representatives of *Socialist Worker*.

SA's national projects and networking are also vital as avenues to maximise members' ability to participate in SA's activities, discussions and direction. Many members, especially non-aligned members, do not relate to the Alliance through their local branch. This is for all sorts of reasons, including that a growing proportion of members live in regional Australia or in suburbs in major cities far from a local SA branch. The creation of citywide, state-wide or national networks, bodies and projects is for some members the most accessible or inspiring "entry" they have into the political life of the Alliance.

In a period of low class struggle like today, progressive mobilisation and organization is pretty thin on the ground, including in the suburbs. Without the re-emergence of mass movements, which reach into every sphere of social life, it will be impossible to build SA and increase its influence on politics exclusively or even largely through local branches. In these political conditions, SA - if it is to make the best use of and deepen the left unity it has garnered to date - probably needs to become, if anything, *less* locally focused, unifying our human and other resources more in city, state-wide and nationwide caucuses, discussions and campaigns.

This does not preclude "building roots in the local community", as David puts it. But those words are a platitude (everyone wants to build roots in the community, from the boy scouts to One Nation) when it is presented as a priority form – a model - for building SA. The Alliance's substantive goal is to affect the balance of class forces in favour of the oppressed, and to put SA forward persuasively as a serious alternative, the real opposition, in the process. Building bases in local communities can help achieve those goals, but they are not inherently the most effective sphere in which to strengthen socialists' political weight. In fact, there is no "form" formula – it's always a tactical question.

What *is* indispensable to increasing socialists' influence in Australian political life is a willingness, whether in election campaigns, mass movements or suburban campaigns, to denounce the fake oppositions – principally the ALP – for their attacks on the working class and other oppressed groups, alongside having a united front approach to maximise mass opposition to all attacks by the ruling class. This is a key *content* of our task as socialists today and it is the content, rather than the form, that it is crucial we get right if we are to successfully build the Socialist Alliance.

To this end, parliamentary and council elections are valuable arenas for socialist intervention, and consistently contesting areas where socialists have built up a base over many years does increase the gains of election work. The DSP knows this *at least* as well as anyone in SA, having been one of the very few far-left parties to have struggled for and achieved federal electoral registration (as the Democratic Socialist Electoral League in the early 1990s), and having consistently contested elections at every level of government for decades (including John Percy's 18% vote in the Leichhardt council elections in the late 1970s).

Many SA branches have run terrific election campaigns, not just Wills (for example, in Hobart, Perth Hills, Darwin, Northern Rivers, Sydney West). But election campaigning is *not* a truer path to building a united, multi-tendency socialist party in Australia today than non-electoral movement and campaign work. In fact, right now, elections are far from the most effective way to extend socialists' weight and influence in Australian politics (with an average SA vote that's lower than the informal vote, you'd have to be pretty optimistic!), largely because the electoral space to the left of Labor is still overwhelmingly occupied by the Greens.

In that context, it is dead wrong to dismiss such activities as regular SA street stalls or the distribution of *Green Left Weekly* (and other socialist publications) as mere passive propagandising and a liability to SA building.

First, not one branch or SA member that I know of "thinks that setting up a card table on a Saturday morning is, by itself, going to bring success", and David's denigration of all those members – DSP and non-aligned - who express their strong commitment to building the Alliance by getting out to the people with an SA stall every week is insulting.

That aside, regular SA stalls are an important public face of resistance to Howard – a two- or three-person picket line, if you like, saying "No!" to neo-liberalism, racism and other injustices every week. These weekly public acts defiance against Howard and Co give confidence and courage to others to also say "No" wherever they have the opportunity - in their workplaces, schools, and so on. To the extent that any publication gives people the information they need to say "No!" more confidently and persuasively, it is a valuable tool for us at present. *Green Left Weekly*, with its broad appeal and therefore capacity to give socialists a larger audience, is especially valuable.

But SA campaign stalls are also indispensable points of contact with local people through which we not only get to talk to them about SA's ideas and activities, but get a feel for public sentiment, find out what's foremost in people's minds, etc.

Finally, to minimise the importance of weekly campaign stalls for building the Socialist Alliance is also a bit dishonest on David's part because there is no question that the ISO sees the importance of weekly campaign stalls for *itself* – its members regularly set up ISO/*Socialist Worker* stalls right opposite the Socialist Alliance campaign stall in Newtown, at Glebe Markets and elsewhere in Sydney. That is their right in SA's multi-tendency structure, but they shouldn't then pretend that what's good enough for the ISO (and for a whole variety of other community groups) is not for the Socialist Alliance.

So yes, let's have the collective discussion in the lead-up to our national conference about how to build SA and beat Howard. There's plenty of room in SA for debate, but Howard is drawing a line in the sand right now and the responsibility on socialists' shoulders to get clear what we are doing is urgent and weighty. That means that we have to draw a few lines in the sand ourselves - such as recognising that to beat Howard's agenda we also need to beat Beazley's, and that to get rid of neo-neo-liberalism we can't build just a different colour "Greens party" that strives for the balance of power in parliament and wins a few concessions, etc. To change this rotten system we have to be serious about socialist unity and building the most united, active, nationally effective force for fundamental change that we can.

The briefest of replies

By David Glanz (National Co-convenor)

Lisa Macdonald has raised many more points than can be covered here in the briefest of replies. For instance, her sectarian formulation that the Socialist Alliance needs to "denounce the fake oppositions – principally the ALP" as the way to build an alternative to Labor has to be discussed in detail in a later bulletin.

So I will make just two points.

1) Lisa denies that there is a DSP model for building the Alliance. Of course, it is true that we are all experimenting as we go in building the Alliance – it's a new project for all of us. There's a lot of variety among our branches. But there is a DSP model, nonetheless. You should read it for yourself in *Alliance Voices*, Volume 4, Number 16, December 2004. It includes the heavy downgrading of suburban branches and argues for a citywide focus. This kind of orientation has just won our lead candidate in Perth's Northern Metropolitan Region 239 votes out of 341,850 – that's 0.07 per cent.

2) The erection and destruction of straw people is a weak debating trick. Lisa implies that the International Socialist Organisation is counterposing serious local branches with community connections to the Alliance's citywide or national work. This is simply untrue. As an ISO member I serve as a national co-convenor and ISO members have served as state co-convenors in Victoria, NSW, Queensland and WA. There are two ISO members on the editorial board of *Seeing Red*. ISO members take part in the national trade union co-ordinating committee, the anti-war committee and before that were part of the national federal election committee. Our members take central responsibility for five Alliance branches and are involved in at least six others. We helped write, edit and produce the highly successful Socialist Alliance broadsheets. We have been very much part of the campaign for Craig Johnston (what's more, when the Alliance caucus in Melbourne last year took a position on how to advance the campaign, it was the ISO that defended it publicly while two prominent DSP members chose instead to line up with ALP union officials). We have done more than a reasonable share of fundraising. We have written for *Green Left Weekly* and have a member on the SA-GLW editorial board. The idea that the ISO's position leads to an abandonment of work beyond the parish pump is wrong – and Lisa knows it.

If you would like to discuss these points and any I've raised earlier, please email me at dglanz@optusnet.com.au.

Perth East/Hills branch 'formula' for success

By Barry Healy (Perth Hills branch)

There were a couple of things that stuck me as particularly odd when I read David Glanz's "Lessons of the Melbourne council election success", which one of his ISO co-thinkers circulated on the SA discussion loop in WA.

One was that David asserts that the techniques that he identifies as being the keys to the success of Wills branch are not being used throughout SA. He also, from Melbourne, seems to have formed an opinion about our approach to the WA state elections that fails to understand WA realities.

I would be far more impressed to read about the success of Wills SA branch if David Glanz did not write about it for such transparently factional purposes.

Sharing experiences (both good and bad) between branches is vital for the success of the SA project. Being told that certain models of branch building are the property of particular affiliated groups is insulting to the intelligence of SA members.

The East/Hills branch, of which I am a co-convenor, grew out of the anti-war movement at the beginning of 2003, which in many ways mirrors the origins of the Wills branch. We are a successful branch, as I will explain.

Both co-convenors are members of the DSP, 2 members are members of Resistance and no other members are members of any affiliate. So, according to David's approach we must be applying the "DSP formula" to branch building. We thought that we were just building an SA branch applying whatever formula works, without regard to where good ideas might come from.

How does our approach compare to Wills branch? As it turns out we are quite similar in some ways and, of course, quite different in others.

Our branch is centred in Darlington, which is a mainly middle class commuter dormitory suburb/hamlet in the hills area outside Perth; it consists of 1200 houses. It simply is not appropriate to transfer a formula from the urban working class area of Wills to our locality.

In early 2003 two of us initiated the Hills No War Alliance, drawing upon the parent body at our children's school and the congregation of the local Anglican church. Those two community structures continue to be vital to our success to this day, though support has ebbed and flowed.

So I agree with David that being implanted in the local community is important. The question is how to get that implantation. If the ISO has the magic formula for achieving that then I must say that you've been keeping your light under a bushel for decades. You seem neither better nor worse at it than the rest of us.

Hills No War Alliance built itself through public meetings and video showings at which we collected names of people who were prepared to letterbox leaflets or assist in other ways. Providing locals with easy activity that fitted in with their everyday lives was essential.

The focus of Hills No War Alliance has always been to organise local forums and events while mobilising people to attend the major rallies in Perth.

Hills No War has about 60 names of such people on its lists now. Many now do the same thing for SA, which means that we regularly get thousands of leaflets into letterboxes all over the area.

We attempted a "street stall" to build Hills No War. It was in the park opposite the local general store at the time when parents brought their kids there after school. It worked to a limited extent. People were amazed more than anything else.

We initiated SA by approaching the more left wing activists in Hills No War and having a discussion on the nature of imperialism. From those discussions our branch formed.

We organised public meetings and video showings and recruited slowly. We knew when we organised a showing of a John Pilger film and 92 people attended that we were on the way to success.

Just down the hill from Darlington is Midland, a working-class "struggle town" area with a large Aboriginal population. From the beginning our intention has been to try to spread our influence down to the "flats" down the hill but we have been hampered by a few factors.

One factor is that many people in our branch are parents of young children and simply find it hard to give much time.

Another is the impossibility of holding street stalls in Midland. All public space in Midland is privatised by big shopping malls. Any time we try to campaign where there are people the security guards move us on within moments.

So, like Wills branch we don't do street stalls, but not from choice!

Also, like Wills branch we meet monthly. But we additionally hold a monthly public event like a forum or film (so effectively we convene fortnightly). We also go to as many Perth events as we can get to, like the anti-war rallies and IWD.

Wills branch has had success around local issues, something that we haven't been able to achieve yet. The only hot local issue that has arisen was a hospital rationalisation that we couldn't get in on because the only two members who had the opportunity to attend the meetings were too inexperienced to intervene.

The major breakthroughs for us have been associated with election campaigns. In the federal campaign we managed to double the size of our branch to 18 members (and get 284 votes).

Federal Campaign

We launched our campaign by sponsoring the Midland premiere of *Fahrenheit 9/11*. We mobilised the letterboxers and distributed thousands of leaflets. 200 people came, financing both our federal and state election campaigns.

More than that, it established us immediately as the centre of radical politics here. ALP members, Greens, Oxfam activists and all the other strands of progressive politics were there and from that night on all local eyes have been on East/Hills SA branch.

We letterboxed thousands of election leaflets and held local meetings. We only campaigned in the few hamlets around Darlington because the Pearce electorate is a huge rural electorate that arcs around Perth with a small urban wedge including this area.

We agonised over the choice of the electorate but finally opted for campaigning in the area where we are known rather than trying to break the ground in the working class areas nearby. The choice was the correct one.

Pearce also covers another commuter suburb north of Perth, on the coast (about 2 hours drive from Darlington). An SA member there campaigned and successfully organised a local film showing. She was coordinated through the Perth central office, we never saw her during the campaign.

That member has gone overseas for 6 months but when she returns she has stated that she intends to launch an SA branch in her area. So, the choice of a geographically wide electorate paid off.

We were pleased with our vote and very pleased that it also gave many new members the experience of campaigning. Other gains were important contacts that we made. For example, the local Greens worked closely with us and were influenced by us and we recruited two high school students from polling day.

Our branch emerged tired but excited from the federal election. The prospect of toiling through the state election did not appeal to any of us; we wanted a break. Luckily for us, we thought politically and not on the basis of our exhaustion!

State Election

The WA state election has been a success for us, with benefits flowing in all sorts of directions.

We were hampered by a number of factors such as the short election campaign (5 weeks, beginning in January while most of us were on holidays). We decided as a branch that all we could realistically do was that we would stand a candidate, hold one public meeting, letterbox and hand out how to votes.

Perth district stood 6 candidates in 3 upper house regions that cover all of central Perth. When considering WA politics, eastern states comrades should consider that while WA covers about one third of Australia, its 1.5 million population is mostly located in Perth – in fact more than 1 million of them live here!

So, by standing in upper house seats our district actually reached the vast bulk of WA citizens. It was a perfect opportunity to search out new areas for SA activity and spread our name around.

And that is exactly how it has worked out for our branch.

The one local public forum we held was on Aboriginal inequalities. An Aboriginal SA member made a number of contacts and developed confidence through this effort and she now intends to build a further event.

Annolies, our candidate, also addressed a community forum convened by the WA Council of Social Services where the assembled community workers warmly received her speech and contacts were made.

That event, in the working class area of Gosnells, was at the southwestern part of our electoral region. If we had not stood in the upper house region, we would not have ventured into this area.

Local SA comrades from the area, inspired by this activity, including the success of their own contributions, are now seriously talking about organising their own branch.

Another East/Hills SA member in a different part of the region made such good contacts handing out how to votes that she is now organising a film showing with the intention of building a local branch.

Contact was also made with a major militant union that has an office in the region, which provided us with photocopying services.

Our high school student members, initiated into campaigning, are continuing energetically at their school and are building our coming Darlington film showing.

And of course, votes count! We got 698 votes – without the name Socialist Alliance being on the ballot paper (we don't have WA registration yet).

We will closely examine the booth results to see where we'll be expanding our activities next.

I have a relative who was part of the Greens campaigning team and it is apparent from speaking with her that the Greens see our result as showing that we have arrived in WA politics. Actually that is too premature and probably reflects their feelings about losing so many seats.

A realistic appraisal is that we have opened up opportunities for SA, opportunities which will take us years to fully explore.

We began locally, but in this election campaigned regionally. If we had stuck to our own little patch, as David recommends, SA would be the weaker.

Reply to Lalitha Chelliah on NAC

By Craig Hall (Wills branch)

Why is it amazing that I took several months to think and respond to the discussion that took place at the 2004 National Conference? Why is principled political criticism cynical or venomous? By starting the comrade's reply to my article without any qualification as to why "the cynicism and criticism is venomous" Lalitha's warning misrepresented why I think the Non-Aligned Caucus (NAC) does not represent me in Socialist Alliance (S.A.).

When Lalitha asked why it took so long in writing my article for Alliance Voices (A.V.) the distinct impression I have is that the good comrade was putting me down. The question was irrelevant, because I needed time to digest and reflect on the conference discussion. I consider that a reasoned political response was made on my behalf. More to the point, there have only been three issues of A.V. since the conference. The first was minutes reported back just afterwards. My criticism was made in the second issue not published until September. The third issue was not published until November, where Lalitha made her reply.

At another point comrade Chelliah asked: "Where were you at the conference? I do not remember you involving yourself in debate or making contributions." May I remind you that the National Conference was a delegated conference. Eight out of every nine members weren't delegates so couldn't speak on the conference floor.

Another put down is the argument Lalitha made that she didn't know who I was. This was a put down, and I am afraid that this will discourage many readers of A.V. who have never contributed before from contributing. For the general S.A. membership to be taken seriously, to have to be "known" by a National Convenor it is quite an elitist position to take.

I was only aware of the NAC around National Conferences. With this Lalitha then stated: "but clearly you did not want to take a stand and that is your democratic right." By suggesting that I did not want to take a stand when I was not

even aware of NAC meetings, further misrepresents me. Even worse, Lalitha stated it was my democratic right! What does this mean for the rest of the non-aligned members in the S.A.?

In another part, the worldly comrade corrected me, and pointed out that the NAC never wanted to organise like the affiliates. Thank you for arguing against a point I never raised. But I will engage here in charging that the NAC uses anti-affiliate rhetoric, while in reality acting as an affiliate. It is not like other S.A. affiliates because all of the other affiliates are tightly united around a political platform. The difference with the NAC is that it is tightly united around organisational principles.

Lastly, I would just like to recap my original political criticisms as to why the NAC doesn't represent me. These criticisms seem to have been lost among the misrepresentations of my political position that comrade Chelliah threw herself into. Hopefully Lalitha will now engage in a principled political debate. Just to summarise, the NAC is (1) A group united by organisational objectives, not political program. (2) In reality, from what I can see from public documents, the NAC is quite closely aligned to the Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP) on all key issues within the Socialist Alliance. (3) The NAC denies this relationship but gets the numbers in support of DSP proposals. (4) The NAC is a small, tight, and organisationally focused faction that dominates the National Convenors.

Money for tsunami victims, not war!

The following statement on the tsunami crisis was issued by the Socialist Alliance on January 15, 2005.

The initial response by the world's richest countries to the earthquake and tidal wave disaster in Southern Asia has been pathetic. While many of these countries have poured billions into invading and bringing misery to the people of Iraq, they cannot seem to find anywhere near enough money to seriously help the mainly poor people who have been made destitute by this natural disaster.

The US government's initial pledge of \$35 million contrasts sharply with the \$152 billion it has spent in its invasion and occupation of Iraq. Its initial pledge of \$10 million was less than it spends in a single hour of occupying Iraq.

The British government has pledged only \$1.7 million to date, while spending many billions in Iraq, and the European Union as a whole has pledged only \$5 million. The people of Victoria alone pledged almost as much as the British government in one day.

Australia's response

Australia has promised just \$35 million so far, and some additional practical assistance - despite spending close to a \$1 billion on the Iraq war so far. SA condemns the cynicism of the Australian government's PR stunt of increasing its "aid" to Indonesia to \$1 billion, but requiring half of that to be repaid, with interest and not increasing aid to other less "strategic" countries affected by the tsunami. John Howard is taking advantage of the compassion of ordinary Australians to extend Australia's domination in the region. Australian officials will sit in Jakarta with decision-making power over the way the Australian \$1 billion is spent. Australian officials and police already have too much power in PNG and the Solomons. This new move cements the Australian government's role as the imperialist Big Brother of the region.

Tying aid to Australian control over its expenditure (many Australian officials are being located in offices in all the countries affected) the Howard government is using the suffering of the people in the region to entrench and extend the Australian ruling class's military and economic control in the region. Australian corporations will make huge profits from the "reconstruction" of these countries - Australian "aid" to the victims is in fact a huge subsidy to Australian big business (just like it is in Iraq).

\$1 billion is a tiny amount when compared to the government's expenditure on killing people in Iraq, and especially to the amount of profits extracted from the affected countries by Australian corporations over many decades. Australia should assist all the countries affected countries as opposed to selectively providing aid based on political and strategic interests. The Australian government can massively increase its aid to all the countries affected (the projected budget surplus for 2004-05 is \$6-7 billion) and give it without strings attached.

The people of Australia have pledged more than a 100 million dollars to assist the victims of tsunami. This huge outpouring of solidarity by ordinary people in Australia and around the world stands in stark contrast to the western governments' slow and still paltry responses. The economic rationalists who run most of the world's governments obviously believe that killing people is more rational than saving lives. It's time to reorient their priorities to human need, not war and corporate greed.

Nearly 60 percent of Australians now believe the war in Iraq was "not worth it". The Socialist Alliance has been campaigning for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Iraq and we now call on the Howard government to immediately divert all the resources it is spending to assist the US occupation into helping the victims of the disaster in Asia. SA demands that all foreign debts of the 12 countries affected by the tsunami should be cancelled.

Further, we will continue to demand that the Australian government end its material and diplomatic support for the Indonesian military's war on the Achenese people. SA also condemns the Indonesian and Sri Lankan governments' use of the disaster as cover for further attacks on the Aceh and Tamil liberation struggles, and extends SA's solidarity to those resistance movements.

Socialist Alliance condemns US/Australian torture of Mamdouh Habib

The following media release was issued by the Socialist Alliance on January 16, 2005.

After years of campaigning for his freedom, as part of the national campaign, the Socialist Alliance is deeply relieved to hear that Mamdouh Habib is to be released from the United States' concentration camp, Camp X-Ray, in Guantanamo Bay.

We express our warmest regards to Mr and Mrs Habib and their children, all of whom have been put through hell by the US and Australian governments. The Socialist Alliance commits to help the Habib family try to rebuild their life in whatever way we can, free of any harassment or prosecutions.

The Socialist Alliance is outraged by the horrific torture Mr. Habib experienced in both Egypt and Guantanamo Bay at the hands of the US government, including electrocution, being stripped and beaten, months-long blindfolding, chemical injections, a dog being put on him when he was naked, and interrogators telling him that all his family had been killed. British eyewitnesses have confirmed all this. Revelations from Abu Ghraib only further demonstrate what cruelty the US state is capable of.

The Socialist Alliance similarly condemns the Australian government for its appalling role in the torture of an Australian citizen. The Australian government:

1. backed the illegal and indefinite detention of Mr Habib without charge;
2. applauded the denial of Mr Habib's basic legal rights (legal counsel, fair trial, the Geneva convention etc.);
3. [according to recently released US military court documents] had an Australian official witness the torture of Mr Habib.

The federal government has been unrepentant about its despicable brutality. Howard has ruled out compensation or even an apology to the Habib family. The Attorney General, Philip Ruddock, has even implied - without a shred of evidence - that Mr Habib knew in advance about the September 11 World Trade Centre bombing and is threatening to "monitor" and harass Mr Habib when he is returned to Australia. Even Bob Carr has jumped on the wagon announcing that the NSW government will be the "praetorian guard" in controlling Mr Habib.

"Clearly, the Australian and US governments are on the defensive, trying to vilify a victim of its war on civil rights to avoid too much opposition," said Raul Bassi, national co-convenor of Socialist Alliance. "The Socialist Alliance pledges to expose the government's lies and oppose the misnamed "war on terror", i.e. the plunder of Iraq and destruction of civil rights here in Australia. The release of Mr Habib will only make us more determined to continue the struggle for the freedom of David Hicks and all the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay."

Bassi added that the criminals that really needed to be kept under surveillance in the "Habib case" were the federal government. He pledged that Socialist Alliance, as an intransigent defender of democratic and civil rights, would do everything in its power to expose Canberra's complicity in crimes against humanity, here and Iraq.

The Socialist Alliance demands the Australian government:

1. Ensure Mr Habib is returned to his family immediately.
2. End the slurs on Mr Habib's name and cease all state harassment (Not a shred of evidence has ever existed to charge Mr Habib with anything. Leave him and his family alone. They have suffered enough.)
3. Immediately issue an apology and compensation to Mr Habib.
4. Immediately demand the release of the other Australian Guantanamo detainee, David Hicks.
5. Immediately condemn the US torture centre, Camp X-ray, and demand its closure.
6. Immediately withdraw its troops from occupied Iraq.

Release the Egyptian socialists

The following letter was sent by the Socialist Alliance to the Egyptian Ambassador to Australia on January 5, 2005, as part of an international protest. Ibrahim Sahari, Marwa Farouq and Baho Abdallah Baksh have all since been released.

H.E. Mr Mohamed M. TAWFIK
Ambassador
Arab Republic of Egypt
1 Darwin Avenue
Yarralumla ACT 2600
Your Excellency,

As a national and legally registered political party in Australia, we write to you to express our condemnation of recent actions taken against the Center for Socialist Studies in Cairo.

We understand that on Friday 28 January, security forces at the Cairo International Book Fair arrested Marwa Farouk of the Center for Socialist Studies, a lawyer at the Shalakany law firm and member of the Bar Association, and Baho Abdallah, a postgraduate student at the American University in Cairo. They were charged of disseminating false propaganda. Soon after police at the Book Fair assaulted Ibrahim El Sahari, and then arrested him for the same charges in addition to the charge of assaulting an officer inside the police station. Police confiscated a copy of a recent

publication of the Center titled "Socialists' route to change: a militant socialist vision for change in Egypt" (official registration number (864/2005), a copy of the last issue (no. 7) of "Socialist Papers", a magazine produced by the Center, a number of publicity brochures of the Center, and flyers calling for a peaceful rally to be organized by the Popular Committee for Change at the Book Fair on 4 February. All three were summoned in front of the state security prosecution office, which decided to extend their imprisonment for 15 days.

On Sunday, 30 January, security forces at the Book Fair confiscated all copies of the book, "Socialists' route to change", which was exhibited in Hall 4, in the booth of Merit Publishing House. They also confiscated all copies of the last issue of Socialist Papers, which contains a whole section on change in Egypt. This is despite the fact that all those publications are public and fulfill all legal requirements.

The Center has been publicly and openly struggling for democratic rights for the people and against poverty. The repression of the Centre's activists and the confiscation of its publications carries a message to all proponents of freedom and democracy in Egypt.

The members of the Socialist Alliance in Australia take seriously our internationalist obligations to give solidarity to those fighting for freedom and against oppression and poverty in Egypt. We ask you convey to the Egyptian government our call for those arrested to be freed and that there is free circulation of political publications.

Sincerely,
National Convenors

Bring the troops home - don't send more!

The following statement was issued by the Socialist Alliance on February 24, 2005.

The Socialist Alliance adds its voice to all those speaking out for peace, human rights and social justice to condemn the Howard government's decision this week to double the number of Australian military personnel in Iraq.

The presence of even more foreign combat troops in Iraq will not bring greater peace and freedom to the Iraqi people. More than 100,000 Iraqis have already died at the hands of the "coalition of the killing" and Howard's decision can only result in more death and destruction - not only for Iraqis but also for Australian service-people. Howard's claim that this intervention is not Vietnam revisited is utterly wrong.

As other western governments withdraw their forces from Iraq, the Australian government is instead - and once again - putting its military and economic alliance with the United States government and big business ahead of the wishes of the Australian people, and the needs and democratic rights of ordinary Iraqis.

Howard says that more Australian troops in Iraq will strengthen democracy, yet the Iraqi people did not invite these extra troops. On the contrary, the people of Iraq have made it abundantly clear that they want their sovereignty, they want an immediate end to the brutal and illegal occupation of their country.

Neither does the Howard government have a mandate from the Australian people to increase its military presence in Iraq. Howard's intention to increase the number of Australian troops in Iraq was not even mentioned during the federal election campaign, and opinion polling consistently shows that a majority of Australians oppose any increase in Australia's intervention in Iraq.

The Australian government's decision to take Australia deeper into the quagmire of this brutal occupation, and its persistent refusal to enact the will of the majority, will be condemned and challenged across Australia on March 18-20. As part of an international weekend of protest on the second anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, people around the world will take to the streets to demand: End to the occupation of Iraq - Bring the troops home.

Abortion: women's bodies, women's lives, women's choice

The following fact sheet was produced by Socialist Alliance for distribution alongside the Alliance's pro-choice petition. Both the petition and the fact sheet can be downloaded from the web site at: www.socialist-alliance.org

The current 'debate'

Conservative religious and political leaders are at it again, trying to restrict women's access to abortion in this country.

Since its re-election in October 2004, the Coalition federal government, with right-wing Christian support, has steadily campaigned to make abortion a contentious issue. Health minister Tony Abbott is publicly campaigning for an end to Medicare rebates for terminations, and Christopher Pyne, federal parliamentary secretary for health, is organising opposition to all abortions after 12 weeks' pregnancy.

Subsequently, a statement of opposition to later abortions has been issued by a coalition of religious groups; National Party senator Ron Boswell has put "questions on notice" to Tony Abbott - to dig up any information he might be able to use to undermine abortion access; and Family First senator Andrew Evans is trying to assert that abortion is harmful to some women's mental health.

On the legal front, one doctor is being prosecuted for Medicare "fraud" for charging an "out-of-pocket" fee on top of bulk-billing Medicare for abortions - something the peak body of abortion providers says is a legitimate, usual fee-structure, without which many abortion providers would not be able to operate.

The conservatives' longer-term goal is to stop women's access to abortion altogether, and they have two immediate aims as steps towards achieving that goal - to eliminate Medicare funding for abortion, and to have the laws changed to restrict when a woman can have an abortion - seldom after 12 weeks of pregnancy and never after 20 or 21 weeks. These attacks come straight from the example of the United States, where the federal health insurance scheme doesn't fund abortion and a ban on "late-term" abortions was enacted in 2003.

The anti-choice campaigners know that an all-out ban on abortion would provoke massive public opposition, so they are hoping to wind back whatever they can now and lay the basis to remove more later.

This is particularly the case with so-called "late term" abortions (however that is defined). If restrictions on abortion access based on pregnancy duration become acceptable, the issue is shifted away from all women's right to control their own reproduction to "getting the timing right".

Women's right to choose

Women's right to choose whether or not to continue a pregnancy must remain non-negotiable. The impact of pregnancy and childbirth on a woman is so great that no matter what other political, social or economic rights women have, if they do not have control over whether or when to have children, it will be meaningless to speak about women controlling their own lives.

Later abortions

Opposition to later abortions is often couched in terms of the "need" to "re-examine" abortion in the light of technological developments – as though the fact that a foetus is potentially able to survive birth cancels out the pregnant woman's right to make the decisions about her body and her foetus.

First-trimester abortions (up to 12 weeks' pregnancy) account for over 95% of terminations. Most later abortions are performed for health reasons (medical conditions of the woman or the foetus). While those who want restrictions on later abortions are sometimes willing to accept medical reasons for later terminations, there are also groups of women more likely to need later abortions for other reasons. These women would be harshly disadvantaged if access were restricted.

They include women with irregular periods due to menopause or the commencement of menstruation, and the use of recreational or prescribed drugs, including hormonal contraceptives like Depo-Provera. As well, younger women are often more reluctant to acknowledge the possibility of pregnancy, and can find it daunting to approach family, friends or health services for help. Getting the money together for the out-of-pocket expenses of a termination may exacerbate this.

Rural women, too, sometimes require later procedures. Lack of confidentiality in a small town where there may be only one doctor, the need to travel long distances to access abortion and the associated costs put already vulnerable women at an added disadvantage and delay their attendance for a needed abortion.

Whatever the circumstances, restricting or banning abortion based on pregnancy length takes the control of her own body out of the hands of the pregnant woman and places it in the hands of others - doctors, politicians, priests or conservative crusaders. Removing access to later abortions is part of a push to remove all access to abortion – it must be resisted.

Medicare

What is particularly odious about the proposal to remove Medicare payments for abortion is that, as with any issue of public funding, the most vulnerable would be most badly affected. While rich women would still be able to access abortion, many poorer women would not. The result would be either a significant increase in unwanted children or more cheap and unsafe "backyard" abortions, and certainly greater economic hardship for many women.

The majority of abortions are carried out in private clinics, with out-of-pocket expenses on top of Medicare. To be really equitable, abortion should be made freely available through publicly funded, dedicated units (whether in hospitals or as free-standing units, depending on local needs), where confidentiality and respect for the woman's decision is assured.

Repeal all abortion laws

The anti-choice lobby is trying to whittle away by stealth women's right to access abortion. If they succeed, the outcomes will be horrendous. Historical experience shows that when safe, legal, affordable abortion is not available, women still have abortions, but many suffer enormously - physically and mentally - in the process. Some die as a result.

The current attempts to restrict women's access to abortion is helped by the existence of anti-abortion provisions in the criminal codes of every state and the Northern Territory. Even the ACT, where abortion has recently been decriminalised, restricts access after 12 weeks' pregnancy.

Women's access to abortion is legally possible at the moment only as a consequence of either particular court rulings (in Victoria, NSW and Qld) or amendments to the criminal code (SA, NT, Tasmania and WA). But the very existence of abortion in the state and territory criminal codes has always left the door open for the right-wing to try to further limit access to this service. In WA in 1998 and Tasmania in 2001, doctors stopped providing abortion as a result of police investigations sparked by anti-choice complaints.

In a more ongoing way, legal restrictions on when and under what circumstances women can access abortion - such as the obligation to undergo counselling or the requirement that two doctors certify that an abortion is necessary for the woman's mental or physical health, etc - place extra hurdles in the way of women who already have to deal with having

an unwanted pregnancy and finding services that can help. Such restrictions also give credence to the view that it is not the pregnant woman, but the state, that should decide whether or when a woman can terminate an unwanted pregnancy.

The only way to resolve this is to repeal all legislation specific to abortion - there are already many laws governing medical and surgical procedures under which abortion can be adequately covered. Then the decision about whether or when to have an abortion can be where it belongs - in the hands of the woman concerned. It is her body and her life, and must be her choice.

May Day 2005

The following motion was ratified by the Socialist Alliance National Executive on February 6, 2005.

"With the ACTU and many unions arguing that it is pointless and counterproductive to organize mass demonstrations of unionists to protest against Howard's anti-union attacks, Socialist Alliance will seek to turn May Day into a national day of protest against the Howard government's attack on trade unions.

In some cities this may mean arguing within pre-existing May Day committees that the May Day march should be turned into well-advertised protests against the Howard government. In cities where the May Day committees don't adopt this approach, Socialist Alliance could work with other progressive groups and sympathetic unions to build a 'fight-back against Howard' contingent. And in cities where there is no tradition of May Day marches, SA branches might be able to initiate an organising group to get a May Day protest against Howard.

This action will not replace the mobilisation of mass delegates' meetings against Howard's agenda.

The campaign should also reflect SA's opposition to the Iraq war."

Letter to the Greens about the Werriwa by-election

The following letter was sent to the NSW Greens and Greens NSW senator Kerry Nettle by the Socialist Alliance on February 12, 2005. The Greens' reply follows.

Re: Werriwa by-election

The Socialist Alliance National Executive last week discussed the upcoming Werriwa by-election.

The Alliance will not be standing in this by-election, but the National Executive decided, in the interests of gaining the largest possible vote to the left of Labor, that the Socialist Alliance should on this occasion offer its support to the Greens candidate. This would mean, beyond calling on Socialist Alliance supporters to vote 1 Green and 2 Labor (or Labor before Liberal), that the Alliance would offer practical support to your Werriwa campaign, in particular on polling day.

We feel this is the most effective way under the specific circumstances of such a by-election to build progressive alternatives to Labor, which will be critical if real opposition is to be built to the social and political agenda of the Howard government.

The Socialist Alliance will, of course, issue its own statements and leaflets commenting on the issues in the by-election, but these will stress the need for the unity of all progressive forces against Howard's neo-liberal, pro-war and anti-environment agenda.

We hope that the Greens will find this approach positive and look forward to your reply.

If you want to contact our Sydney committee to discuss the help we can make available, please feel free to ring Kieran Latty on 0409 749 084 or Graham Matthews on 9690 1977 or 0403 802 944.

Yours in struggle,

David Glanz, Louise Walker, Raul Bassi, Lisa Macdonald and Lalitha Chelliah
National Convenors

Greens' reply

Dear Lisa,

Thank you very much for extending the support of Socialist Alliance to the Greens campaign in Werriwa. Your help would be very much appreciated, as it is vital that the people of South West Sydney are given a real alternative to both the Liberals and the continued dominance of Labor in this area.

I will contact Kieran or Graham within the week to confirm details, but wished to convey our gratitude,

Yours,

Jennifer Hanson

on behalf of

Werriwa By-election Campaign Committee

Letter to Children by Choice

The following letter was sent by Socialist Alliance to Children by Choice (Qld) on March 3, 2005, in response to their proposal of "reciprocal membership" between the Alliance and Children by Choice. Their reply follows.

Sheila Sutherland
Children by Choice
PO Box 2005
Windsor 4030
Dear Sheila,

Thank you for your letter of February 16 suggesting a reciprocal membership arrangement between Children by Choice and the Socialist Alliance. We very much support the spirit of your proposal but, as a registered political party whose membership categories are subject to Electoral Commission requirements, we do not at present have provision in our membership rules for this sort of reciprocal membership.

However, the formalities aside, we would like to strengthen discussion and joint activity between the Socialist Alliance and Children by Choice in whatever ways we can. The Socialist Alliance in Queensland has email lists, which you can be added to to facilitate the exchange of information, and our members involved in pro-choice campaigning hold discussions about this activity which you might find useful to participate in.

We have asked the Alliance members in Brisbane to get in touch with you to follow up these and any other options for closer networking, and wish you all the best in your important work to defend women's right to choose against the current attempts to restrict it.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with the national conveners (details above) or with the Queensland state committee at PO Box 547, Fortitude Valley 4006, or brisbane@socialist-alliance.org, or 3831 2644 at any time.

In solidarity,
National Conveners

Children by Choice reply

Dear Lisa

Thanks for your letter and we'd love to be included in the e-list for exchange of information and I'll include Socialist Alliance in our e-list.

Appreciate your time in replying and here's to stronger networking.

Thanks again.

Sheila

Administrator
Children by Choice

