

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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Note to all members: The deadline for submitting resolutions to be put to the 2005 National Conference is midnight on Sunday, June 5, 2005.

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

What can a branch achieve?

By Ben Courtice (Footscray branch)

To situate our work in Footscray [one of two branches in the Melbourne West district] in some sort of national context, it's probably worth looking at our national organisation's achievements. A lot of particular aspects could be singled out; for my own list, I think the following are our most important gains:

1. Electoral registration. Despite our poor election results it's a demonstration of our strength that we were able to leap the hurdles posed by the electoral commission - even if, like Humphrey McQueen [in the latest issue of *Seeing Red*], you think we were chasing the wrong priorities.

2. *Seeing Red*. This non-factional, well-presented journal has pulled in a range of people who would not normally engage with the left press, and its high standard of articles gives it the potential to redden Australia's anaemic left intelligentsia, who have little more than *Overland* and perhaps *Eureka Street* to look at otherwise.

3. A relationship with the militant trade unions. We know that many of their leaders are still in the ALP, and that many of their members are not so familiar with us, but we have achieved a fruitful working relationship, for example in the call for a mass delegates' meeting in Melbourne and the Free Craig Johnston committee.

Two other achievements stand out to me, despite remaining controversial in form or substance (or both): the process of left unity and the relationship with *Green Left Weekly* (GLW), one of the most widely read socialist newspapers in the Anglophone world.

Whatever modulations and/or re-prioritisations the Socialist Alliance makes, I can see no way that a retreat from any of these 5 points can be painted as good; nor is a retreat on any of them inevitable.

The Australian socialist movement, including the Alliance and others, has certainly felt the impact of demoralisation after the huge (but brief) 2003 anti-war movement. We know our activist pool has diminished, and, after the elections, many branches have no doubt taken time to re-orient to non-electoral activity. On the question of what can or should be done, I hope that ideas from the Melbourne West branch experience can be helpful.

First, we have always supported progressive local campaigns. We helped Somali youth organise against police harassment; we helped to organise a rally to save the Sunshine swimming pool from being turned into a car park; we have organised ongoing solidarity for pickets, such as the long Electrical Trades Union picket of Smorgon Steel and CEPU (posties) pickets during their enterprise bargaining agreement campaign; we have initiated a campaign against the extension of the local Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre (MIDC). All this has helped us to increase recognition and support in the local community.

We have had a hectic pace to organise fundraising to run an office, fund elections and publicity, and even contribute to GLW fundraising by organising joint fundraising events.

Our political reach out has included successful film showings across the suburbs (to Altona, Yarraville and Braybrook) where we have met and joined new supporters. This is part of our rationale for launching a new branch in Melbourne West - Yarraville.

When David Glanz suggests (*Alliance Voices*, vol 5 no 1) that weekly Alliance street stalls (with or without GLW) are not the recipe for success, I can admit they aren't a panacea. But if I was to criticise our activity in Melbourne West, it's that our suburban campaign stalls have become too few. It was in part through these that we built successful film screenings in new suburbs like Altona and Yarraville. Further, people who read about our activities in the local press are given the opportunity to meet us face-to-face at these stalls, and we have met many people in this way in the past.

As the new Howard term sinks in, the Melbourne West district is charting a new course which I believe utilises all the strengths I listed above. A list of the events we have planned illustrates this. Our last Footscray meeting was held simultaneously with a John Pilger film screening attended by nearly 40 people organised by the neighbouring Yarraville branch. We nevertheless had a successful meeting, hearing from two union members, Chris Spindler, an Australian Manufacturing Workers Union organiser, on Howard's anti-union legislation, and Victoria University's National Tertiary Education Union secretary Jamie Doughney, who spoke on his article in the last issue of *Seeing Red*.

We are currently initiating a series of forums sponsored by *Seeing Red* at Vic Uni. We are planning support for the April 28-29 strike of the Vic Uni NTEU. We are planning a large public forum involving the Justice for Jack Thomas campaign (www.justice4jack.com) on the theme of "War on Terror vs. Your Rights". We have lobbied the council to initiate an inquiry into the MIDC and have had interest in this campaign from activists across Melbourne. We plan to run on this campaign in the council elections later this year.

Obviously we don't yet know how well all these will succeed, but it demonstrates that despite the despondency of the left (especially the liberal left) at the moment, there is really no shortage of activities of local, national and international significance for the Alliance to participate in. The propaganda of Pilger films and *Seeing Red* discussions can mesh very neatly with local and national campaigns. In the right circumstances, we can even establish Alliance presence in new suburbs and areas.

I think that the first three of the Alliance's gains for the left (which I raised at the start) are a good axis to build a united multi-tendency socialist party around. We have engagement with the class struggle, engagement with "official politics" in elections, and ideological/propaganda publications (including GLW, hopefully in an ongoing way in my opinion). Not all branches will find themselves with the membership base of Wills or Footscray, nor necessarily the same opportunities (MIDC, police racism campaign, etc), but we have the framework in place - notwithstanding difficult political times, perhaps - to continue building the foundations of future growth.

Debate: what should socialists do about Labor?

The following articles have been reprinted, with the permission of the authors, from Socialist Worker #547, April 14, 2005. Dick Nichols is a member of Bankstown SA branch and the Managing Editor of Seeing Red. Brian Webb is a member of Sydney East SA branch and the SA National Executive.

Above all, tell the truth

By Dick Nichols

Come July 1 with its Coalition Senate majority and the Howard bulldozer starts to move in earnest. How to slow the juggernaut? How to again build up the resistance that the splendid protests in support of the MUA in 1998 and against the Iraq war in 2003 have shown to be possible in this country?

This vital question is at the heart of debate in the Socialist Alliance. Inevitably this involves discussion about how to relate to the Australian Labor Party.

The Socialist Alliance's National Conveners recently adopted a resolution on this issue. Its first paragraph reads:

"The National Conveners reject any idea that it is ultra-left or sectarian to criticise or denounce the ALP.

"Given that the principle aim of the Socialist Alliance project is to build an alternative to the left of Labor, the Alliance must, if it is to win over those who are starting to break to the left from the ALP, confidently and consistently present an honest and accurate analysis of Labor Party policies and practices from a socialist perspective, even if at times this requires a blunt statement of facts.

"To not do this would mean conceding crucial political space for building the left in general and the Socialist Alliance in particular."

Why is this clarification of Socialist Alliance's approach in the present political phase necessary?

Because the chances of winning against Howard depend critically on building a movement of politically aware militants who understand what is needed to win and have no illusions about the ALP in government nor the behaviour of the ALP machine in any mass protest movement. The greater the influence of such a militant minority the greater our chances.

But won't tens of thousands of workers get more active against Howard if their traditional (usually ALP-dominated) organisations call them into action?

Shouldn't we be prepared to make big concessions to get them on board?

The massive 1990s protests against Jeff Kennett's anti-union laws showed that hundreds of thousands could be drawn into action — *once there was a serious desire on the part of the union leaderships to organise it.*

But it is precisely that desire which is now most missing—either because the powers-that-be think the Coalition can't be beaten, or because they think demonstrations are pointless (Greg Combet), or because they don't really disagree with Coalition policy at all (NSW minister Michael Costa), or because they don't want to give "the punters" ideas about also protesting against neoliberalism in its state ALP format.

In general, the only way to produce useful motion from these leaders is through mass pressure and the threat of exposure: the bigger the demand for action arising from the ranks of the unions and other movements, the more the traditional leaders will have to think about at least pretending to act.

That's how the protest and solidarity movement in support of the MUA developed in 1998: the militants (including some ALP unionists and rank-and-filers) got stuck in, the people responded, and then the ALP notables scrambled to bring up the rear.

No one who is in any way familiar with the practice of Socialist Alliance could seriously regard this necessary approach as sectarian towards ALPers who want to resist Howard.

As the second paragraph of the National Conveners' resolution states:

"We recognised ... at our last national conference that, in order to build a left alternative to the ALP, it is not enough to restrict ourselves to 'simply' denouncing Labor.

"The Alliance will always look for ways to draw ALP members and bodies into any struggle in defence of working-class and democratic rights and against war, but we do this in the knowledge that it will not be possible to build a left alternative without publicly denouncing Labor's anti-working class positions."

We Alliance members should always look to act alongside everyone, Labor and Green, rank-and-file and leaders, and we should also be flexible and intelligent in making the compromises that allow alliances for serious action to take root.

But if we don't connect that struggle to our central goal—to carry the fight against Howard into a deeper transformation of politics and society—all we will get is Bomber Beazley as PM on a basically unchanged political landscape.

That ghastly prospect can't be avoided unless the Alliance maintains its truthful drumbeat of "Lest We Forget" about Beazley, Carr, Laurie Ferguson and the rest of the ALP's rogues.

And the more we act in united fashion along that line, the better the chances for the anti-Howard movement, the radicalisation of Australian politics and our common socialist cause.

Dick Nichols is a leading member of the Democratic Socialist Perspective.

Action not ultimatums

By Brian Webb

What should the left say about Labor? This is a crucial question because Labor's federal election failure has had a demoralising effect on the anti-war movement, unions and others.

Socialist Worker supporters argue that socialists, Greens and others need to build links with those in the ALP who are fighting for better Labor policy on issues like refugees and Iraq. We have supported involvement of ALP members on platforms at anti-war rallies and have supported Labor for Refugees and unions within the party.

We have also argued that it is important to raise demands to change Labor's policies regarding refugees, free trade, and withdrawing troops from Iraq.

By doing so we hope to not just build a bigger left, but also hope to convince many about the importance of alternatives such as the Socialist Alliance, and revolutionary socialist organisation around papers such as *Socialist Worker*.

The Democratic Socialist Perspective's attitude to Labor creates unnecessary division on the left and restricts socialists to making empty propaganda.

Lisa Macdonald argues in *Green Left Weekly* (16/3/05) that a "willingness to denounce the fake oppositions—principally the ALP" is "indispensable".

DSP comrades felt this was so important during the 2004 election that they organised a small protest outside the ALP election launch in Brisbane, which was gleefully used by the national media to undermine an ALP vote.

The ALP certainly deserves criticism and in many cases condemnation, but there are many workers who feel betrayed by Labor yet still vote Labor. Simply condemning the ALP hardly tells them *what to do*.

There are plenty of trade union officials who keep their membership of the ALP quiet, while expelling hot air about ALP betrayals. Socialists need to go further than angry denunciation.

Firstly there are those that we want to work with inside the ALP. The participation of MPs such as Carmen Lawrence and Harry Quick in the anti-war movement has strengthened it.

There is also the brilliant Labor for Refugees movement, which almost overturned ALP policy last year and created real debate inside the party for the first time in decades. The DSP had nothing to say to these people except that they should leave the party.

Leading DSP member Dick Nichols argues in *GLW* (26/1/05) that worrying about the state of the ALP is a distraction from building the extra parliamentary opposition, and that it is utopian to believe that the ALP's policies can be changed. To the question "Is there any chance of the ALP reviving?" Dick Nichols answers: "Does it even matter?"

In *Socialist Worker's* view, it does matter. If Labor had won the last election the anti-war movement would have felt stronger and more confident as it would have meant that Australian troops would have been withdrawn.

While Labor would have pursued "Liberal" policies on free trade and refugees, we have more chance of pressuring a Labor government to change, than a Liberal one.

Labor's stance on issues matters too. When the ALP opposes Liberal policies it shapes public opinion. When Labor mirrored the Liberals' refugee policy in 2001 it meant that an overwhelming majority of people accepted the racist perceptions of refugees, something which the refugee movement has to its credit reversed to some extent over the last three years.

What would it do to Howard's industrial relations agenda if the ALP pledged to repeal all the proposed changes if elected? Whether we like it or not it matters what the ALP says.

People vote Labor instead of Socialist Alliance because the ALP is big, has a chance of winning, has local community bases, has historical roots in the working class, was once was a party that delivered real reforms in government, and reflects the political views of many trade unionists.

The DSP's view seems to be that simply denouncing Labor will be enough to convince workers to vote Socialist Alliance.

Issuing ultimatums is unlikely to build the "left unity" that is needed to resist Howard's attacks. Neither will it build a left alternative to the ALP.

Worse still it feeds into cynicism and passivity, because it says that we shouldn't expect anything better or push Labor to take a stance on any issue.

Rather than let the ALP leadership get off scot free, the left, both inside the ALP and outside, need to place demands on Labor.

Brian Webb is a leading member of the International Socialist Organisation.

Greater collaboration in anti-war work will bring bigger rewards

By Pip Hinman (Marrickville branch & national Anti-war Committee Co-convenor)

It's been a hectic first part of the year for Socialist Alliance comrades involved in the anti-war movement. Together with some dedicated independent activists in a handful of cities, we have had the job of maintaining the movement's public face in a period when confidence about protesting has been sapped. Without SA's determination to continue to

explore ways of waking up that sleeping giant of dissent against the Iraq war, there would have been few if any national protests since the war began two years ago, and the local peace groups would have further dwindled.

SA is involved in all the city-based anti-war coalitions (in many cases keeping them alive), as well as in many local peace groups. We made opposition to the war a central plank of last year's federal election campaign, and we've continued to make it, alongside our work in the unions and building a fight-back against Howard's anti-union agenda, our other main social movement campaign.

This continued commitment to building the anti-war movement has undoubtedly been a major factor in raising SA's profile and political credibility nationally. So there is a logic in SA coordinating its work in this arena – something which could be improved.

Within SA, there's little argument that we shouldn't be devoting resources to building the anti-war movement. Yet there seems to be, at the very least, a passive resistance coming from comrades in the International Socialist Organisation – who are devoting a lot of resources to the anti-war movement – about doing this work collectively through SA.

To make this discussion as concrete as possible, I'll refer to several instances of poor collaboration.

End the lies

In the lead-up to the "End the Lies" pre-election rally in Sydney last October a leading ISO comrade announced at an End the Lies rally organising meeting that he did not agree that "Bring the troops home" should be part of the rally's demands. He had identified himself as being from Socialist Alliance, yet he hadn't discussed this with other SA comrades also at the meeting.

It is SA members' democratic right to argue what they see as correct. But, it certainly put other SA comrades in a difficult position, especially as they were acting on the unanimously endorsed ISO-inspired motion from our 2004 national conference that SA would encourage pre-election rallies with the "troops out" demand.

As it happened, the Greens activists and some independent activists in the End the Lies meetings were keen on the "troops out" demand, although some independent activists were unsure. Nevertheless the latter were open to persuasion, and even those who didn't change their minds (and lost the vote) didn't walk out of the organising committee. Despite this, the ISO comrades were set against the "troops out" demand, insisting it would narrow down the rally (See *Socialist Worker* <http://www.iso.org.au/socialistworker/535/p4b.html>).

Unity in action

For at least two major anti-war rallies, the ISO has by and large decided against being part of a united SA contingent, or to even hand out or carry SA leaflets and placards. The most recent example was the March 18-20 invasion anniversary rallies where in Sydney and Melbourne (with a couple of exceptions) the comrades marched behind an ISO banner, held *Socialist Worker* placards and declined to distribute SA material when asked, including the newly printed national recruiting leaflet.

The SA National Convenors, which include ISO leader David Glanz, had unanimously adopted a recommendation on January 20, 2005 that SA organise city-wide united contingents for the anniversary protests.¹

There's no question affiliates have the *right* to distribute their own papers and leaflets. What I am questioning, however, is whether it's a *good idea* for SA to be seen at major peace events as a united alliance or not? Even from the point of view of trying to build up SA's political credibility in between elections, it would seem advantageous to have a united face at major peace movement rallies.

This does not preclude SA members marching with their local peace groups, or with Stop the War Coalition in Sydney's case. This is a tactical decision and doesn't cut across the main argument that presenting the united face of SA at major peace movement events is a plus for the organisation.

Local peace groups

SA comrades are involved in 12 city-based peace coalitions (Perth, Adelaide, Hobart Melbourne, Geelong, Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle, Canberra, Lismore, Brisbane, Darwin), a number of local peace groups in Sydney and some in Melbourne.

With the exception of Melbourne (which just established an SA anti-war and civil liberties caucus at its last state conference), SA anti-war activists have met semi-regularly in Perth, Sydney and Brisbane to plan our work. In practice, this has largely brought DSP and independent SA members together, the ISO often deciding not to attend. Again, this is their prerogative, but it begs the question of whether this helps or hinders the possibility of maximising the gains for SA.

¹ January 20, 2005 motion: "The NC strongly recommend to all State and City committees to organize city or statewide conferences, as soon is practicable, to discuss and approve the main campaigns in the area. These conferences should be organized ensuring the broadest participation possible, making all members to be active in the decision the planning and the organization. These campaigns should be taken as the priority activity for the branches ensuring maximum united action. The International Day against the war on Iraq, 20/3, supported for NC as national campaign should be an indicator of how we can achieve united action, making sure that united contingents of the SA take part in all actions." Motion passed without dissent by Raul Bassi, Lalitha Chelliah, Louise Walker, David Glanz, Dick Nichols (standing in for Lisa Macdonald).

NSW state co-convenor Kieran Latty writes in *Alliance Voices* Vol 5, No 3 that “the ISO has made a concerted effort to try and strengthen or re-launch peace groups and strengthen the connection between them and SA”. The second part of that assertion does not square with experience.

Around the country, ISO comrades are involved in five state-based coalitions (Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra and Brisbane), and a number of local peace groups (five in Sydney and one in Melbourne).

There have been at least two recent instances in Sydney where it became clear that the ISO comrades involved in organising local peace movement meetings (Leichhardt and Marrickville) were very reluctant to agree to non-ISO Socialist Alliance comrades speaking, or chairing, even when this proposition had come from independent SA comrades. In addition, at both meetings, the ISO did not assist with the SA promotional stall (which carried affiliates’ publications, as well as SA material), electing instead to staff their own tendency stall.

SA was a sponsor of a recent Marrickville and Newtown peace group meeting, along with Stop the War Coalition and the Greens, and it attracted a good number of people. But rather than do what Kieran said the ISO had decided to do at its conference, the ISO chair did not mention SA once (meanwhile, all the other sponsors got a Guernsey).

To clarify: I am *not* arguing that SA should somehow *automatically* have representation on every anti-war platform. But I am arguing against the view, implicit in the ISO’s approach in the peace movement, that SA is not so relevant outside election time. One of their leading members has even argued that to give SA a platform at a local peace group public meeting would be “sectarian”.

ISO members are putting effort into reviving some local peace groups in Sydney. This is certainly an important part of rebuilding the peace movement, and getting back in touch with those who marched in February 2003 and who are still angry about the occupation. DSP members are involved in helping re-launch some of the local groups, as are some unaffiliated SA members. But in some cases, ISO comrades have simply announced speakers and plans for the re-launching of the group. This can be useful at times, to move things along, but what is lacking in this approach is the notion that the work could be done so much more effectively if it was collectivised within SA.

This collectivity becomes difficult if, as in the case in Sydney, only one or two ISO comrades ever attend SA’s district anti-war meetings. Again, this is their decision, but the question must be asked: why not try and collectivise the work through SA?

There are two contrasting examples of local peace group organising in Sydney: the Randwick Peace Group where the ISO comrades have done good work building up an active group, but where SA has little profile; and the Canterbury-Bankstown peace group, which has also had great success in broader networking with the campaign for the release of Mamdouh Habib, and where SA’s profile is high and widely respected in the Muslim community, the Green and Labor Party networks and the Turkish community, among others.

Perhaps the ISO’s reluctance to collaborate on this critical area of work stems from their particular conception of the Alliance – that SA is a “united front of a special kind” with a particular focus on contesting elections. According to this view, non-electoral work should be organised by affiliate groups, not by SA.

But this argument is not even internally logical. To do better in elections, surely SA has to develop its profile through non-electoral movement work? Handing out election leaflets around election time will not be enough. SA *is* a united electoral alliance, but it also much more than that – and has to be to survive this particular political conjuncture.

If we were to remain narrowly an electoral alliance, SA members will be doomed to disappointment in the next elections in this politically conservative, relatively well-off country where the Greens are widely recognised as *the* parliamentary protest party.

Pretty much everyone in SA agrees that the left has an urgent task to rebuild the peace movement and broaden an understanding about why it should be supporting the Iraqi people’s right to self determination. The opportunities for galvanizing at least some of that sleeping giant of mass dissent against the war may come sooner than we expect, with the extra troop deployment and the likelihood of more Australian troops being killed.

Collaboration is essential

A practical step to circumvent some of the difficulties would be for all comrades involved in the anti-war movement to give collaboration in the SA district- and city-wide campaign meetings a go. It appears to be bearing fruit in our union work, and there’s no reason for it to be different in the peace movement arena.

These cross-district or city-wide organising meetings are also the most practical avenue for independent SA members to be able take part in discussing SA’s work and making decisions. The locality monthly (or fortnightly) branch meetings generally do not have all the information and therefore cannot fulfill this job. It gives greater opportunities to those who do not belong to affiliate organisations (who do caucus) to take ownership of SA.

SA can coordinate its work in the movement arena without stifling affiliate rights. But to do this, the political will has to be there. If SA is to grow, and gain political legitimacy, collaboration is essential.

The Soviet Union, Cuba and socialism

By Chris Slee (Wills branch)

Melanie Lazarow (*Alliance Voices*, vol. 5, no. 2) claims that: “It is well known that the ISO and the Democratic Socialist Tendency have a different view of what socialism is, as reflected in our historical differences about whether

Stalinism was real Socialism, albeit a deformed kind. This difference is also reflected in the perspective on whether Cuba is Socialist”.

In reality, the Democratic Socialist Perspective (formerly Democratic Socialist Party) has never said that “Stalinism was real socialism...”. We have always believed that the Stalinist bureaucracy was an anti-socialist force.

It is true that the DSP and the International Socialist Organisation had different analyses of the former Soviet Union and other Stalinist states. But comrade Lazarow's brief comments do not do justice to this debate.

The DSP took its analysis of the Soviet Union from Leon Trotsky, who was one of the leaders of the Russian revolution and became the most prominent opponent of the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalin.

Trotsky argued that the Soviet Union could not be simply categorised as either “capitalist” or “socialist”. He viewed it as a transitional society - “a contradictory society half way between capitalism and socialism”, as he said in his 1936 book *The Revolution Betrayed* (Pathfinder Press, 1972, p.255).

Trotsky argued that, while the Soviet state had undergone a process of bureaucratic degeneration, this had not totally reversed all the gains of the revolution. He saw state ownership of the main means of production as an important achievement of the socialist revolution. He believed that the restoration of private ownership would mean “a catastrophic decline of industry and culture” (*TRB*, p 251).

Trotsky saw the survival of state ownership as an indicator that the revolution was not totally dead. He argued that the bureaucracy “continues to preserve state property only to the extent that it fears the proletariat” (*TRB*, p.251). By this he meant that the bureaucrats would have liked to convert state property into their own private property, but were held back by fear of the reaction of the working class. (It should be borne in mind that Trotsky was writing during the Great Depression. Privatisation at that time would have meant sackings on an enormous scale, so a fear of working-class rebellion would not have been totally unreasonable).

Trotsky believed it was necessary for the working class to overthrow the bureaucracy while defending state ownership of the means of production. He predicted that if the bureaucracy was not overthrown it would eventually restore private ownership of the means of production (as indeed it did several decades later - resulting, as Trotsky had predicted, in a “catastrophic decline of industry and culture”).

The DSP, while agreeing with Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet Union, tried to analyse and respond to new developments as they occurred. When Gorbachev began talking of democratic socialism, we hoped that this would inspire workers to challenge bureaucracy in the workplace and in society as a whole, thus setting in motion an anti-bureaucratic revolution. This didn't happen. There was no genuine socialist party able to lead such a struggle. Instead, the bureaucrats were able to carry through a policy of rapid privatisation.

The ISO disagreed with Trotsky's view that the Soviet Union was a transitional society, instead arguing that it was “state capitalist”. They took their analysis from Tony Cliff, who argued that since the state owned the means of production, and the Stalinist bureaucracy controlled the state, the bureaucracy was the effective “owner” of the means of production. He claimed that the role of the bureaucracy was essentially the same as that of a capitalist owner of the means of production, and hence the bureaucracy was effectively a capitalist ruling class, albeit different in form from the usual kind of capitalist class (the private owners of the means of production). Since Cliff saw the bureaucrats as the “owners” of state property, he saw no reason why they would want to restore private property.

In this article it is not my intention to discuss the merits of these two views of the former Soviet Union. I have outlined them only to clarify what the differences between the DSP and ISO on this question actually were. I encourage comrades interested in this topic to read both Trotsky's book *The Revolution Betrayed* and Cliff's *State Capitalism in Russia*.

At this stage I merely wish to comment that the differences over the nature of the former Soviet Union do not necessarily imply a “different view of what socialism is”, since neither the DSP nor the ISO considered that the Soviet Union was a socialist society.

I do however want to discuss Cuba in more detail. The differences over Cuba are not merely historical, but concern the nature of Cuba today. The DSP thinks Cuba is a workers' state, while the ISO thinks it is a capitalist state.

The DSP considers that, while there are problems with bureaucracy in Cuba, they are qualitatively less than in the former Soviet Union under Stalin and his successors. Cuba is not ruled by a hardened layer of privileged bureaucrats who repress the working class. (This helps explain why Cuba did not collapse when the Soviet Union did).

In 1921 Lenin described the Soviet Union, of which he was the central leader, as “a workers' state with bureaucratic distortions”. (See for example Lenin *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 48). Such distortions were a product of the backwardness of Russia, the devastation caused by war, and the continuing isolation of the new workers' state in a capitalist world.

Similar factors have applied in Cuba since the 1959 revolution. Hence it is not surprising that similar bureaucratic distortions exist.

It is worth noting that Tony Cliff did not object to Lenin's use of the term “workers state with bureaucratic distortions” to describe the Soviet Union in the early 1920s (Cliff quotes the phrase in *State Capitalism In Russia*, Bookmarks 1988, p. 27, except that the word “distortions” is translated as “deformations”). In Cliff's view Russia did not become state-capitalist until 1928-29, when Stalin began the forced collectivisation of agriculture, forced-pace industrialisation, and the imposition of a totalitarian political regime (*SCIR*, p. 164-6).

The ISO does not see any analogy between Cuba today and the Soviet Union in the 1920s, because it denies that a workers' revolution ever occurred in Cuba.

The ISO claims that the revolution was made by a few guerrillas, with no participation by the working class.

In reality, the workers and peasants played a very active role in the Cuban revolution. A general strike, coinciding with the entry of guerrilla forces into Havana in January 1959, developed into an insurrection that helped destroy the old state apparatus. The old army and police disintegrated. Fidel Castro said the general strike made “a decisive contribution to victory”.

During 1959 there were four more general strikes in support of Castro and his radical reform program, including demands such as land reform.

Workers played an active role in bringing about the nationalisation of industry, participating in demonstrations and in many cases occupying their own workplaces to demand nationalisation. Workers and peasants were armed to defend the country against the threat of a United States invasion.

These struggles by the working class and its allies led to a radical transformation of Cuban society. In my view they created a workers’ state (albeit with bureaucratic distortions).

The reluctance of the ISO to recognise that Cuba is a workers’ state is partly based on their view that the workers played no role in the revolution. But it is also based on their view that Cuba today is a bureaucratic dictatorship.

Initially the Castro government, although brought to power by a popular upsurge, was not elected by the people. In the 1970s, however, the system of Peoples Power was established, through which the Cuban people elect local, regional and national representative bodies, with the right of recall.

This does not satisfy the ISO, because the Cuban system of Peoples Power does not exactly follow the model of the Russian soviets. The ISO has an ideal model of what a workers’ state should look like, and any departure from this model is taken as evidence that Cuba is not a workers’ state.

But the Russian soviets themselves did not conform to the ideal model for very long. Initially workers and peasants freely elected their representatives to the soviets from among a number of competing parties. But by the early 1920s there was only one party in the soviets.

Why was this? On the one hand, most supporters of the revolution had joined the Bolshevik Party (or at least supported it). For example, a group led by Trotsky joined the Bolsheviks in 1917. But on the other hand, during the civil war and the period of acute social crisis that followed, parties opposed to the revolution were banned.

Similarly in Cuba the main revolutionary organisations came together to form a single party, while the counter-revolutionary parties were suppressed.

Most of the criticisms which the ISO makes of Cuba today could also have been made (and indeed were made) about the Soviet Union in the early 1920s, when Lenin and Trotsky were still at the head of the Soviet state. Cliff recognised the Soviet state at that time as being a workers’ state, despite its bureaucratic distortions. The ISO is inconsistent in not recognising Cuba today as a workers’ state.

Cuba is not a socialist society, but a society in transition between capitalism and socialism. The DSP recognises that socialism cannot exist in a single country isolated in a capitalist world, especially a backward country like the former Soviet Union or today's Cuba. But this does not mean that, if the revolution does not immediately spread throughout the world, nothing can be done to begin the transition to socialism.

A revolutionary government can lead the workers and peasants in expropriating capitalists and landlords, and defending the country against counter-revolutionary attempts. Such a transformation can result in big gains for the workers and peasants. Cuba's achievements in health and education are an example.

Whether or not the Cuban revolution survives will depend on international solidarity, and on the ability of the Cuban government to organise and mobilise the people to defend and extend the gains of the revolution. Whether Cuba advances towards socialism or reverts back to capitalism will depend ultimately on the spread of the revolution internationally.

In conclusion, the differences between the DSP and the ISO are not about “a different view of what socialism is”. The differences relate to the transition between capitalism and socialism. The ISO's lack of clarity on how this transition can occur leads them to fail to recognise societies that have begun the transition.

Such differences should not however prevent us from working together in a comradely way to build Socialist Alliance.

A reply to Carl Kenner's arguments against Alternative medicine

By Lalitha Chelliah (Melbourne North East branch & National Co-convenor)

This is a topic that has been a bone of contention between the hard sciences and the soft sciences for many decades but in this paper Carl has added another dimension by dragging in the “alternative medicine” angle, which is only partly related.

Research the topic you say Carl, but do you know the real dynamics and realities of research and science? Below is a small part of a research I did partly on this topic.

Brief history of scientific development in the South

It is well known that early civilisation had developed complex and productive agriculture, especially along the major rivers of the world like the Tigris, Euphrates, the Nile and the Yangtze, and the Indus valley. These civilisations were well advanced in medicine, metallurgy, town planning, the invention of the wheel, sailing and many other branches of science.

Goonatilake explains that, 'the conventional historiography of science has led to a false sociology of ideas. Many of the scientific ideas had already developed in South Asia where a predominant slave mode of production did not exist. One misconception ... is that forum for rigorous intellectual developed only in the West. ... Plato's academy provided a central forum for discussions till 6th Century and was precursor of today's universities. But this is a Eurocentric view; forums where deep intellectual discussions were held existed in India from early times, examples being the great universities at Banares and Taxila, which were known certainly in the 6th Century BC, and Nalanda'.ⁱ Goonatilake notes that among the well known alumni of Taxila were Panini, the 4th Century BC grammarian, Kautilya, the author of *Arthashastra*, and the Charaka, one of the two great names of Indian medicine; it seems that veritable colleges existed in these "university towns"; in an establishment in Banares 500 students were educated by a number of teachers, all maintained by charitable donations.ⁱⁱ

He also claims that there was great and rapid intercourse between the Western and Eastern cultures in trade and ideas; there also was a marked spread westwards of other cultural products such as stories and fables from the South Asia region which he says is a very good indicator of the flow of ideas between the regions. He gives several examples of such stories that were later reflected in Christian parables.ⁱⁱⁱ He continues that the major Arabic transmission was mathematics, which the Arabs called *hindisat*, 'the Indian' (art). The knowledge transmitted comprised the Indian method of arithmetical notation and enumeration, the concept of zero, the decimal system, algebra and trigonometry. The South Asian methods of argument and logic resulted in the development of formal logic, in a continuous process from the 2nd to the 17th Centuries. Although in Western philosophy formal logic had its beginnings with Aristotle 'and although the subsequent European philosophers learned to reason minutely and exactly, they did so over a narrower range than the Indians' and were unable to match the extensive analytical conceptualisation of the Indian sub-continent. Concerning forms of argument and reasoning it has been established that it was the sub-continent that produced 'a more self conscious and highly formalised model'.^{iv}

One of the most recent direct influences on scientific development has been the impact of South Asian ideas on psychology. This Goonatilake claims has been the result of both direct influences by original texts and indirect influences through Asian systems such as Zen Buddhism. Humanistic psychology drew its initial inspiration from existentialist European philosophers but later found an increasing identity of views between its own theories and those of the Hindu-Buddhist tradition. The most celebrated humanist psychologist, Maslow began to use terms such as 'High Nirvana' and 'Low Nirvana' to describe concepts in the new psychology. And before his death Maslow would flatly declare of the new psychology 'Our goal is the Eastern one of ego-transcendence'.^v

Goonatilake claims that the earlier South Asian Intellectual tradition had been delegitimised.^{vi} Three major inventions revolutionised world history; printing, gunpowder and compass.^{vii} These became the very foundation of weapons during the colonial era when the Southern nations were subjugated by the Northerners. This has enabled the wholesale superimposition and legitimisation of Western tradition and knowledge to be studied in universities and practiced in centers of science and technology. Goonatilake adds that, quite often there is no organic interaction between this new, imposed intellectual tradition and the earlier organic knowledge on South Asia.^{viii}

Previously there was considerable overlap and mutual influence between the Western and Asian cultures. Goonatilake states that the bifurcation of the European and the South Asian tradition is only recent date.^{ix} Recent history demonstrates the obvious facts of the problems created by colonialism that remain. The very psyche of the West being the best still dominates the "developing nations". The very strong and determined fashion in which, western culture has spread is clearly seen in the forms of global food store chains, drinks like coke, kinds of clothes worn in the form of blue jeans and several other easily identifiable images, visibly dominate every day life. Even the concept of 'beauty' has been commercialised and coveted by the Western nations and corrupted to present very Western images at an international level, especially amongst women. This superiority complex of the West was not earned but was beaten out of and at the expense of the poorer nations over at least five centuries. The new globalisation has reined in the various nations to abide by international standards and unwritten laws. English has become the international commercial and scientific language. When a 'third world' person wishes to make a living in the commercial world s/he has no choice but to learn the language. The situation is not much different in science; Richard Horton, editor of *Lancet* states, 'Many Third World authors, editor's note, are tripped up by language. "If you see people making multiple mistakes in spelling, syntax and semantics, "says Floyd E. Bloom, editor of *Science*, "you have to wonder whether when they did their science they weren't also making similar errors of inattention." It is interesting however, that acceptance rates for papers from India, where English is widely spoken, still tend to fall far below those for French and German articles.'^x

In a study by Gaillard observes that given a choice, students from the less industrialised countries, tend to prefer to study abroad mainly because a diploma obtained in an industrialised country is usually rated higher than a diploma from a developing nation.^{xi}

In the developing nations generally research is not given the sort of prestige given to medical doctors and lawyers mainly because of the uncertain career opportunities and low salaries; it is not seen as a fully acceptable profession.^{xii} Many other issues feature in the research area as negative particularly in the developing nations. Gaillard explains the difficulties experienced by the scientists in choosing a topic as a result of the lack of money and most of all proper infrastructure.^{xiii} They are forced to justify themselves to society probably more so than any other profession, which may not seem unfair given the nature of the profession. To this Gaillard's study points out that the choice generally depends on the 'social utility' value; in other words does the topic have the capacity to solve the economic and social problems facing the country?^{xiv} This of course results in the scientists being limited to use value research with a guarantee of marketable products at the end of their research.

The above point may be utilised to lower the prestige of third world research science by the first world scientists and the broader community, which utilises research. The reality though is very different. A study done on 1,431 agricultural research scientists by Busch and Lacy (1983) in the United States revealed that, the first six criteria of the USA scientists was similar to the list of criteria of the study done on third world scientists by Gaillard. When the full list of criteria was used for a broader comparison it did not differ greatly in comparable fields.^{xv} Therefore any attempt to under rate the research scientists from the third world is groundless.

The unjustified superiority claimed by the richer nations displays itself in several ways. One of them is as Gaillard states ' . It is interesting to observe that training abroad seems to confer eligibility for a position of responsibility for which the scientist has no exceptional qualification'.^{xvi}

The crucial point there is that the real domination is one of economy. As mentioned above domination is not only through skin colour and geographical area but also through who controls the finances, trade, production and politics. It is a major weapon used to control nations and its citizens. In a world so clearly divided along political power and economic domination, do scientists from the 'first world' have the desire and ability to stand-alone and defy the economic order? Of course there are exceptions to this but several questions remain unanswered.

While internationally it is recognised that almost all nations as a matter of course have historically developed their own science and have lived by it for centuries, they have been disrespected and denigrated as inferior to western knowledge. As is very obvious, western science is universally respected and accepted as the norm in fact academics and students strive for recognition by studying at western educational institutions or working collaboratively at such institutions. In some instances it is only a matter of prestige and of little practical use.

The Social Context of Science

It is a known that science does not develop in a vacuum. It is worth considering the social interplay in the development of science internationally. Goonatilake states that science in the last few centuries is intimately bound to the specific socio-economic development of the European cultural region; specifically the transition from feudalism to mercantile capitalism and then to industrial capitalism, and more recently to global transnational capitalism. This had deep social and economic changes in the European cultural region, in turn affecting the development of science within Europe.^{xvii} He also argues that scientific discoveries coincided specifically with the needs of the then ruling class, the merchants. Needham states that the growth of modern science is related to the marriage of mathematics to experiment particularly around the time of the Renaissance in Europe. Needham's general position was that emergence of science following the Renaissance saw the emerging capitalist social system affecting the intellectual climate of the time, and the 17th Century scientific revolution as merely a part of an explicit political transformation in which the bourgeoisie come out on top.^{xviii}

Given this history Goonatilake argues that science is intimately related to economic considerations. Although in the initial stages of the industrial revolution developments in science were not very closely related to developments in technology, in recent decades economic imperatives have dictated their funding of particular scientific and technological developments not only by the state but also by large private sector organisations.^{xix}

Scientists are not solely governed by the norms and values of science held by the group. They only partly assess and accept high quality scientific contributions while the rest is governed by many variables such social and psychological and economic distortions. As Goonatilake states, knowledge is established only by reference to an audience of scientists, a group of people who share a great number of tendentious assumptions but are central in legitimizing a claim. 'The specialized scientific community, therefore filters output so that only a small proportion of results become visible and become scientific "facts"...and that what is considered certain, objective and universal can only emerge through the use by fallible individuals of such informal and subjective methods'.^{xx}

This social process as fallible as it may be is recognised and accepted universally as the main legitimiser of scientific work. The social community of scientists reward and punish their peers as any other community. This system of course, as is well known, has an impact on scientific (or any other) product and keeps them under a definite structural restraint.

Regardless of how wonderful or essential and important a discovery may be it is inevitable that it goes through this filtering process, if it is to be accepted by the Northern scientists.

It is worth noting that internationally the most 'scientifically advanced' nations happen to be the rich nations. As Moravcsik indicates, 92% of all scientists live in these rich or economically advanced countries.^{xxi} In addition 90% of the international scientific community reside in the industrially advanced nations.^{xxii}

For scientists from the economically advanced nations, the 'open sesame' into the international scientific community means adopting scientific standards and practices of the 'North'. i.e. choice of language - English, theme - of interest to international scientific journals, neglecting national realities and potential national users of research results.^{xxiii} Scientists from the developing nations of today have a long battle ahead of them particularly when Jerome Kassirer, editor in chief of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, states, '...developing countries should receive guidance on nutrition and immunisation before getting advice on medical editing . Very poor countries have much more to worry about than doing high-quality research...There is no science there,' Horton responds. The under recognition of developing science, he says, represents "ethnocentrism at its worst."^{xxiv} Today the verdict of many in first world countries is that developing nations had a healthier diet than the rich nations. This is because in rich nations today 20% of kids suffer from obesity, which in turn has led to increased rates of Type 1 diabetes and many other health problems. The rich nations have taken a long time to learn what the developing nations have known for many centuries and this includes many European nations.

Unfortunately Carl the problem with modern medicine is that it is owned lock stock and barrel by the private industries. The pharmaceutical industry is one of the worst culprits and their reputation is well known. The other criminals are the doctors and governments that have made health service a private commodity. Therefore it is naïve to assume that modern medicine or allopathy as it otherwise known is the answer to all ailments. In India the ordinary person has access to 4 different types of medical service. Ayurvedic, which is one type naturopathic medicine. Sidha is the other naturopathic approach. Then there is homeopathy, which has its origins in Germany and finally allopathy. Every one of these practices are available to Indians in government hospitals, therefore the people have a choice. The doctors who work in these hospital are trained in the universities of India. In Germany too homeopathic hospitals are funded by the government and are highly utilized.

The traditional medicines of the “developing nations” have their own history. Some modern scientists accept them as scientific discoveries in themselves. They explain them as results of many years of trials and experiments. The Aboriginal people of Australia too have such knowledge that the invaders have even have not fully understood or even discovered.

Just because many modern scientist do not have the capacity to understand, accept these discoveries and knowledge they cannot be just “swept away”. The real crux of this issue is the nature of modern medicine. Modern medicine is based on a curative model. This means they wait till the damage occurs then attempt to fix it. Majority of “alternative medicine” as you call it is much broader and has depth in it as they are based on a preventative model. A good example is the food eaten by many of the traditional communities, European and Asian. Many of the spices that are being discovered by some scientists in the modern scientific world have been used for centuries in those countries. Modern life makes it impossible for those traditional ways to be practiced by precisely the sort of interpretations you have made about alternative medicine.

The other issue is to be able to separate real alternative medicine from the false representations of them. It is also important to have standards for alternative medicine but modern society does not bother to attempt to do this in a genuine fashion. It took the chiropractors and the acupuncturist many decades of battling before being recognized. A very serious attempt has to be made to recognize legitimate traditional medicine so as to save people from the practitioners who are out to deceive people.

My final comment is that unfortunately when you talk about science and scientific materialism interchangeably you misrepresent and misinterpret the very definitions of science and scientific materialism.

ⁱ Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 45.

ⁱⁱ Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 45

ⁱⁱⁱ Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 46.

^{iv} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 47.

^v Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 54.

^{vi} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 41.

^{vii} Spurgeon D., *Southern Lights: Celebrating the achievements of the Developing world*, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa 1995, pp 31.

^{viii} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp41.

^{ix} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp41.

^x Horton R., *Editing Science*, Scientific American, August, 1995 pp80

^{xi} Gaillard J., *Scientists in the Third World*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1991, pp29.

^{xii} Gaillard J., *Scientists in the Third World*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1991, pp36.

^{xiii} Gaillard J., *Scientists in the Third World*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1991, pp43-44.

^{xiv} Gaillard J., *Scientists in the Third World*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1991 pp45.

^{xv} Gaillard J., *Scientists in the Third World*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1991, pp45-46.

^{xvi} Gaillard J., *Scientists in the Third World*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1991, pp58.

^{xvii} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 66-67.

^{xviii} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 68.

^{xix} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 71.

^{xx} Goonatilake S., *Aborted Discovery; Science and Creativity in the Third World*, Zed Books, London, 1984, pp 73.

^{xxi} Moravcsik M., *Science Development The building of Science in Less Developed Countries*, PASITAM. 1976, pg 77.

^{xxii} Moravcsik M., *Science Development The building of Science in Less Developed Countries*, PASITAM. 1976, pg 75.

^{xxiii} Gaillard J., *Scientists in the Third World*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1991, pp140.

^{xxiv} Gibbs W.W., *Trends in Scientific Communication: Lost Science in the Third World*, Scientific American, August 1995, pp81

SA-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board report and resolutions

Submitted by Alex Miller (SA-GLW Editorial Board Liaison)

Note from Alex Miller: The following letter, along with the revised report and resolutions (below) produced by the Socialist Alliance-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board for the national conference, was submitted to the SA National Conveners after they referred an earlier version of the report back to the board at the April 24th NCs phone hook-up. I had no opportunity to respond to the NCs' reservations at that hook-up.

Letter to the National Conveners

April 30th 2005

Dear comrades,

Please find attached a revised version of the report from the GLW-SA editorial liaison board that we discussed at the National Conveners phone-hook up on Sunday 24th April. I would like to make a few points by way of pre-empting objections like those raised at the hook-up:

The report is not advocating a "democratic centralist" decision-making structure for the ongoing GLW-SA integration process. Although we recommend that the current board be replaced by a 6-person board all of whose members are committed to developing the GLW-SA partnership, this does not amount to democratic centralism as we conceive of the 6-person board as a *working group*. Decisions about how to proceed with the partnership are made by the National Executive and the National Conference, not by the GLW-SA board: the board's role is to come up with proposals on how to *implement* Socialist Alliance policy on the GLW-SA relationship, not to formulate that policy. Given that the board is to be a working group dedicated to furthering the GLW-SA partnership, we see little point in its having members who are openly hostile to the whole partnership. Note that any proposals the board makes have to be ratified by the Socialist Alliance National Executive before they become policy. Talk of "democratic centralism" is a red herring.

We do not believe that it is "presumptuous" to assume that SA is moving towards taking (a development of) *GLW* as its own paper. This has been Alliance policy for over 18 months, as detailed in the preamble section of the revised report.

The report notes that of the 17 *Our Common Cause* columns that have appeared since the relaxed guidelines were adopted in December 2004, only 6 of these are authored by members of SA who are also members of the DSP. 4 are jointly authored by the SA National Conveners, and 7 are authored by members of SA who are not members of the DSP.

We are not claiming that in terms of content *GLW* has *already* been successfully transformed into the paper of the Socialist Alliance. Far from it. All we claim is that we have made some modest but genuine progress in that direction, and that in order to take the process further we now need to step up a gear and appoint a working board dedicated to the GLW-SA integration process and willing to work constructively towards progressing it further.

Finally, if you are committed to furthering the GLW-SA partnership but do not think that the current report and resolutions offer an effective way of furthering the partnership, it is not sufficient just to say so: in that case we need some genuine, concrete leadership from the National Conveners on how to take this process forward.

Comradely,
Alex Miller

Revised Report and Proposals Socialist Alliance-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board April 2005

PREAMBLE

Green Left Weekly is the best known, most widely read paper of the left in Australia, with a broad coverage of a range of issues and perspectives from the socialist left, radical environmentalists, minority groups, and trade unionists, with the ability to command the support of respected and internationally renowned journalists such as John Pilger. The Green Left Weekly website is the most visited political website in Australia, now averaging more than 10,000 hits per day.

Since early 2004 Green Left Weekly and Socialist Alliance have been engaged in a trial partnership governed by a set of protocols agreed between SA and GLW. In particular, GLW has made available: space for a regular weekly column *Our Common Cause*; free advertising for SA and discounted rates for SA members and affiliates; and, overall, and second to none, the type of coverage and exposure appropriate for a nascent political party like SA.

The present report should be read against the background of a number of decisions by the Socialist Alliance National Conveners, National Executive, and National Conference. In the wake of the Socialist Alliance 2003 National Conference decision to progress SA in the direction of "a single, multi-tendency socialist party", the DSP made a number of proposals to the Socialist Alliance with the aim of facilitating "radically broader access and involvement of SA in GLW" (See *Alliance Voices* Vol 3, No 10, September 2003 for the full text of the DSP's letter). The DSP's

proposal was subsequently accepted for a trial period by the SA National Executive on November 14 2003 (See *Alliance Voices* Vol 3 no 12, November 2003 for the full motion).

On December 12 2003 the SA National Executive accepted the SA National Convenors recommendation to “initiate a 4-month trial period for SA to undertake an editorial role on GLW” and to establish a 9-person Editorial Board whose work would include “1. Securing access for SA members and affiliates and soliciting relevant material. 2. Preparing material that informs and promotes SA to GLW readers on behalf of SA. 3. Oversighting the public presentation of SA within GLW, and adjudicating any issues regarding publication of SA material that may arise with the GLW editorial committee, including further consultation with NC and NE as required. 4. Establishing draft protocols for working with the GLW editorial committee on behalf of SA, including recommendations for NC and NE consideration and ratification as required”(See *Alliance Voices* Vol 3 no 13 December 2003).”

The December 2003 National Executive motion was subsequently reaffirmed by the National Convenors when they rejected the “A paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance petition” on February 23, 2004 (See *Alliance Voices* Vol 14 No 1 March 2004). The June 2004 National Conference of Socialist Alliance decided “to continue the relationship developed in the trial period, including the functioning of the editorial board in the capacity spelled out in its original charter motion of 12 December 2003 and with the additional charge of increasing collaboration with the GLW editorial team with a view to increasing the Socialist Alliance's editorial input into, and involvement in the production of, Green Left Weekly” (See *Alliance Voices* Vol 14 no 12 June 2004). Subsequently, on December 12 2004, the Socialist Alliance National Executive accepted the GLW-SA Editorial Board’s recommendation “that the National Executive continue the existing relationship with Green Left Weekly and attempt during the next six months to take some modest steps forwards with a constructive engagement in the broader editorial process” (see *Alliance Voices* Vol 4 no 16 December 2004).

Alliance Voices can be downloaded at <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/idbpage.php>

REPORT

1. The charter for the trial period was outlined in the protocols agreed to between Socialist Alliance and Green Left Weekly in 2003 and endorsed by the February 2004 National Executive. The main objectives are set out as follows: "This first set of protocols between Socialist Alliance and Green Left Weekly has as its main objectives (a) encouraging and securing greater access and input by the Socialist Alliance, its members and affiliates into Green Left Weekly; and (b) placing the projection of Socialist Alliance within Green Left Weekly in the hands of an editorial body that is accountable to and appointed by the Socialist Alliance."

2. As affirmed by the GLW-SA editorial board and the Socialist Alliance NE in November and December 2004 the first objective (a) has been achieved during this trial period up to December 2004, and we now note that it has also been achieved up to April 2005. For the period up to November 2004, see the appendices to the November GLW-SA board resolution. For the period between November 2004 and April 2005, see the back issues of GLW available on <http://www.greenleft.org.au>

3. Objective (b) has also been met. During the trial period so far only one article submitted by a Socialist Alliance member has been rejected by GLW editors as not suitable for publication in the paper. That article (by Michael Morphet) was discussed by the SA-GLW editorial board that agreed that it was not suitable. It was subsequently withdrawn by the author. Only one complaint from an SA member (David Glanz) has been received. This concerned an OCC column by James Vassilopoulos and a comment and analysis piece by Dick Nichols. The GLW-SA editorial board rejected both complaints.

4. Green Left Weekly editorials have been written within the framework of SA policy, as agreed, and no objections to any of these have been recorded by the board from within the board or the broader SA membership.

5. The Our Common Cause feature has been flourishing, with columns in every issue of GLW since the inception of the column in early 2004. In the period since the December 2004 Socialist Alliance NE's ratification of a more relaxed set of guidelines, the following columns have appeared:

Money for tsunami victims, not war: SA national convenors
Drop the charges against refugee-rights activists!: SA National Convenors
United action can stop anti-union laws: Sue Bolton
Che's face still stirs rage on injustice: James Vassilopoulos
Socialist Alliance condemns torture of Habib: Raul Bassi
The ALP: Swapping deckchairs on the Titanic: Dave Riley
No black-out! No whitewash!: Ray Jackson
There is a real election on in Western Australia: Ian Jamieson
Bring the troops home — don't send more!: SA National Convenors
Money for aid, not war: SA National Convenors
Those who pay the piper call the tune: Alex Miller
The commandment of 'mutual obligation': Dave Riley
Unity needed to reawaken the sleeping giant: Pip Hinman
United action can stop anti-union laws: Sue Bolton
Seeing Red web page launched: Dick Nichols
May Day Greetings: Craig Johnston

Make IR 'reform' Howard's poll tax: Alex Miller (pending)

The Board notes that of these 17 columns, only 6 are authored by members of SA who are also members of the DSP.

6. In December 2004, the NE accepted the GLW-SA board's proposal that SA "continue the existing relationship with Green Left Weekly and attempt during the next six months to take some modest steps forward with a constructive engagement in the broader editorial process. The SA-GL copy e-list offers a practical medium in which this can be done. Board members should join this e-list to participate in this process". Since then GLW-SA board members have initiated two weblogs to facilitate the integration of SA into the GLW editorial process. See <http://greenleftweekly.blogspot.com/> and <http://saglw.blogspot.com/> These can now be accessed directly through the Alliance's national web page.

7. In line with the GLW-SA board and Socialist Alliance NE decisions in November and December 2004, the GLW editors' draft plan for each approaching issue is now submitted for discussion to the copy list as part of the protocols commitment. It is also submitted to the GLW-SA writers blog that is in the process of being established (see below).

8. As the GLW-SA board now views matters, the main task of Socialist Alliance vis a vis GLW is to come up with concrete, workable proposals aimed at furthering the GLW-SA partnership, in particular, in the words of the November 2003 NE resolution, "negotiating the integration of GLW and SA editorial committees and the transformation of GLW into the national weekly newspaper of SA". Although progress has been made in this direction, the nature of the board's composition has been a frustrating factor in developing the partnership along these lines. The composition of the current board - reflecting a variety of positions within SA on the GLW-SA project as well as on the transformation of SA into a MTSP [multi-tendency socialist party] - has meant that the board, instead of getting on with the concrete work of facilitating the development of the partnership, has instead provided a vehicle for recycling debates that have already been settled within SA. We believe that this was a mistake, and that we need a "working" rather than a "pontifical" or "senatorial" board. The board's job should be to find ways of implementing the decisions of the national conference regarding the GLW-SA relationship, not recycling old debates. Those debates should of course be continued if comrades see fit, but we believe that the proper vehicle for this is Alliance Voices. With this in mind, the board proposes the following resolutions:

RESOLUTIONS

1. That the protocols agreed on in February 2004 be adopted, with the effect of putting the GLW-SA partnership on an ongoing footing.

2. That the current editorial liaison board be replaced by a smaller board consisting of six members, elected by slate at the SA national conference. The board is conceived of as a working group and should not be tied down by revisiting debates that have already been democratically settled within SA. This smaller board will continue the current work of the GLW-SA board, and also make a concerted effort to exploit the current resources - copy list, weblogs - to make progress on developing the GLW-SA partnership. The board will report to the December 2005 NE on progress made towards this end.

3. That the board expresses its thanks to the GLW owners, editor and staff for their encouragement, cheerful cooperation, and commitment to the Socialist Alliance.

4. That in the light of the impetus the SA has received through this partnership the board encourages individual Alliance members who support this project to support it further by *voluntarily* contributing financially, *voluntarily* subscribing to, and *voluntarily* helping to distribute Green Left Weekly.

5. That it be noted that this is not a resolution recommending that Green Left Weekly, as it currently is, be adopted as "the SA paper", lock, stock, and barrel. The board encourages constructive debate from all quarters on how, with GLW as a starting point, the development of an SA newspaper can proceed. Nothing is ruled out a priori. The board encourages affiliates of the Alliance with their own publications, such as Socialist Worker, to consider ways of pooling their resources with those of GLW to create an even more effective vehicle for left regroupment in Australia. The door is open.

National Executive resolutions on Australian politics for national conference

At its meeting on May 8, the National Executive endorsed by majority vote the following resolutions to be put to the 2005 national conference:

1) The ALP's continued rightward shift opens up spaces for left alternatives. Labor's refusal to act as a real alternative to the Coalition during the last federal election contributed to their electoral routing and deepened the disillusionment of a significant minority of the population with the two-party system.

2) As the most established parliamentary alternative to Labor, the Greens have been the main benefactors of this opening. Insofar as the Greens have contested recent elections on an increasingly left platform, their rise is welcome, reflecting a strengthening of the left pole of politics in Australia.

3) In the face of a new offensive against working people's rights and standard of living by the fourth-term Howard government, supported by a largely compliant opposition and pressured by the emergence of Christian right organisations like Family First, the Socialist Alliance will strive to build the broadest possible alliances with all those who want an end to neo-liberalism in order to strengthen the mass resistance to federal and state governments' attacks on the working class and oppressed. In particular, we will strive to achieve the maximum possible unity in action with The Greens, with those breaking from Labor, and with everyone organising in the trade union and social movements against these attacks.

4) The Socialist Alliance has a strategic orientation to left-wing sections of the working class, particularly those organised in trade unions. Currently, this means the Alliance must prioritise our intervention into the campaign against the Coalition government's industrial relations laws, with the aims of building a mass movement that can defend and extend union and workers' rights.

5) At the same time, the Socialist Alliance reaffirms our long-term commitment to building the anti-war movement, and will continue to build to the best of our ability all campaigns for social and economic justice, such as for justice for Indigenous people, to free the refugees, for women's rights and for civil rights, and oppose the privatisation of an d cutbacks to essential public services such as health, energy, water and social services.

6) The deepening crisis of social democracy, the Greens' tendency to parliamentarism, and the political leadership vacuum left in the trade unions and other movements, creates a large space and potential for socialists to play an important leadership role in all major progressive campaigns and movements over the next period. To realise that potential, the maximum possible socialist unity is necessary. All Socialist Alliance members active in movements, campaigns and trade unions should therefore discuss and organise their political work not only through local branches but also as much as possible through inclusive, citywide, state-wide and national SA caucuses with the aim of building the most united and therefore effective socialist interventions possible in all spheres of resistance to neo-liberalism.

7) While the Socialist Alliance has, through the anti-war and other social movement work, recruited many new members, we have not yet fully benefited from the ALP's abandonment of working people. By working alongside all those who want an end to neo-liberalism while putting forward our own positive, socialist alternative, we will win more people to socialist solutions and the Alliance.

8) The Socialist Alliance rejects any idea that it is ultra-left or sectarian to criticise the ALP. Given that the principle aim of the Socialist Alliance project is to build an alternative to the left of Labor, the Alliance must, if it is to win over those who are starting to break to the left from the ALP, confidently and consistently present an honest and accurate analysis of Labor Party policies and practices from a socialist perspective, even if at times this requires a blunt statement of facts. To not do this would mean conceding crucial political space for building the left in general and the Socialist Alliance in particular. We recognised in the resolution adopted at our last national conference that, in order to build a left alternative to the ALP, it is not enough to restrict ourselves to simply denouncing Labor. The Alliance will always look for ways to draw ALP members and bodies into any struggle in defence of working-class and democratic rights and against war, but we do this in the knowledge that it will not be possible to build a left alternative without publicly criticising Labor's anti-working class positions.

9) Socialist Alliance's election results reflect, primarily, the strengths and weaknesses of the extra-parliamentary sphere of politics; that is, socialists' vote is proportional to the level of struggle and consciousness in wider society. As the progressive extra-parliamentary movements grow and deepen, and as socialists prove their leadership ability in those movements, the electoral resonance of socialism will also grow. The Socialist Alliance needs to be constantly testing that resonance by standing candidates in federal, state and local government elections whenever and wherever possible. We do this not as an alternative to consistent extra-parliamentary campaigning, but in order to build the extra-parliamentary movements and campaigns, and win more people to socialist ideas.

National Executive resolutions on Anti-war and International Solidarity work for national conference

At its May 8 meeting the National Executive unanimously endorsed the following resolutions to be put to the 2005 national conference:

Resolutions on the anti-war movement

1. That Socialist Alliance continues to build the anti-war movement, by building the broadest possible movement behind the "troops out" demand. Maintaining the focus on this critical demand is a way of keeping the pressure on the Howard government, which is using Australia's troops in Iraq to signal its support for US unilateralist and global neo-liberal economic plunder plans.

2. That SA maintain and strengthen our work in the city-wide coalitions and local peace groups by collaborating with all those who are against the war, regardless of their political background or party affiliation. In particular we

should seek to increase our collaboration with the Greens, and those Labor supporters who disagree with their party's ambivalent position.

3. The future of the anti-war movement in this country lies with the youth and that's why student and youth organising against the war, with a focus against war profiteers, is so vital to nurture and encourage.

4. Encourage the involvement of the trade unions and seek to involve more union members in the anti-war coalitions. That Socialist Alliance members motivate support within the anti-war coalitions for May Day rallies and marches, as well supporting as the June 30 rallies against Howard's industrial relations attacks. In this way a closer link can be made between the anti-war movement and unionists.

5. That SA encourage anti-war coalitions to support the Hiroshima Day protests in early August, the 60th anniversary of Hiroshima, and that SA encourage anti-war coalitions to organise protests on what will be another international day of protest on the next anniversary of the invasion of Iraq on March 18-19, 2006.

6. Seek SA seek to increase collaboration, wherever possible, with the Arab and Muslim communities who are being scapegoat in the "war on terror".

7. That SA seek to continue to campaign to demand the release of David Hicks from Guantanamo Bay.

8. That SA demand that the charges against Jack Thomas be dropped because the evidence was extracted under torture.

9. That SA seek to engage a broader section of the peace movement in developing a greater understanding of the role and nature of US imperialism in Iraq and the Arab world by hosting debates, teach-ins and other relevant information sessions.

10. That SA support the campaign against the Forbes global CEO conference in Sydney on August 30. The anti-war movement across the eastern states has an important opportunity to draw some conclusions about the relationship between the neo-liberals' corporate agenda and their methods of attaining it – war being "economics by other means". This protest is also a chance to make broader links, and capitalise on the mass dissent against privatisation and other neo-liberal economic policies.

11. Recognize that SA has built up a lot of political credibility in the anti-war movement arena and reaffirm the need for the democratic coordination of SA's anti-war work nationally through the anti-war coordinating group, and on a district- or city-wide basis. This way we can maximize SA's political profile, recruit to SA and build an even broader and more effective anti-war movement in this country. That we present a united face in the main peace movement events – such as rallies and public meetings, by holding SA placards, marching together behind a SA banner, working on the SA stall, handing out current SA leaflets and distributing Seeing Red. This does not preclude tendencies doing other work, as they see fit.

12. Support the campaign in Darwin and Brisbane against the joint military exercises Operation Talisman Sabre, and other military exercises between Australian Defence Forces and the US military. Also support the Fremantle Anti-Sea Swap campaign and oppose to the U.S. military's use of the Lancelin bombing range.

13. That SA actively support the anti-war movement that is developing inside the Australian military.

14. To continue to work with the pro-Palestinian networks to assist in their campaigns against the apartheid wall, for the right of return for all Palestinians, to end the occupation, and for justice and self-determination.

Resolutions on international solidarity

1. Oppose the military/security arrangements being discussed and agreed to between the Indonesian and Australian governments, keeping in mind that no Indonesian military officer has ever been extradited or imprisoned for charges relating to gross human rights violations committed in East Timor, Aceh and West Papua. The arrangements being discussed have as their aim the restoration of military ties, and to clamp down further on the struggles for self-determination in West Papua and Aceh.

2. Oppose the Indonesian government's misuse of tsunami aid for the victims of the earthquakes in Sumatra, the Australian government's manipulation of its "aid" package, and popularize the political and aid initiatives by grass-roots democratic organizations in Aceh and Indonesia.

3. Support the campaigns for self-determination by the peoples of West Papua and Aceh by working with those organisations building awareness in Australia about their struggles and the Australian government's attempts to secure greater economic and military domination in the South East Asian region.

4. Support the East Timorese demand for sovereign rights over all the oil and gas fields on the East Timorese side of the internationally accepted median line border between East Timor and Australia and oppose the Australian government's refusal to accept such a border, demanding instead an arbitrary border giving Australia most of the oil and gas

Fields.

5. Condemn the attempts by the Bush administration to assassinate the Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and overthrow the popularly elected Venezuelan government. Further, we defend Venezuela against the concerted efforts of the Bush regime to undermine its progress on implementing new social and economic programs beneficial for the poor people in the country. Support the Venezuela Solidarity Network initiative to organise the first Australian solidarity brigade to Venezuela, and its one-day conference scheduled for September in Melbourne.

6. Defend Cuba against efforts by the US administration to undermine its sovereign government, and campaign for the release of the Cuban Five unjustly imprisoned in the US.

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7. Support the Social Forums taking place this year in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.
 8. SA recognises that Tamils are an oppressed nation within Sri Lanka, and supports their right to self-determination. This means that Tamils should have the right to choose whether they wish to be part of a united Sri Lanka, to break away and form an independent Tamil state in their traditional homelands in the north and east of the island, or to have some intermediate form such as federalism or autonomy. Regardless of whether Sri Lanka remains a single state or whether the Tamil areas become independent, the rights of minorities must be protected. This includes the rights of Tamils, Muslims and other minorities in Sinhalese areas, and the rights of Muslims and Sinhalese in Tamil areas. SA calls for full political, religious and linguistic rights for such groups.

National Executive resolutions on Seeing Red for national conference

The National Executive voted unanimously at its meeting on May 8 to endorse the following resolutions from the Seeing Red Editorial Board to be put to the 2005 national conference:

1. In light of the unique role of Seeing Red, the editorial board proposes that the Socialist Alliance endeavour to integrate Seeing Red more effectively into the life of the Alliance and its branches by:
 - (i) including a membership/Seeing Red subscription package rate among membership options;
 - (ii) encouraging Alliance members to subscribe individually to Seeing Red; and
 - (iii) inviting writers of current articles in Seeing Red to branch meetings to discuss their contribution, stimulate debate and seek ideas from members about how Seeing Red might reflect the political needs of the alliance more effectively.
2. The editorial board of Seeing Red proposes that affiliates of the Socialist Alliance be asked to:
 - (i) offer joint subscription package rates for their dedicated publications and Seeing Red;
 - (ii) provide links to, and advertisements for, Seeing Red on their dedicated web sites and/or the sites of their dedicated publications;promote Seeing Red in other ways in their activities; and encourage their members also to implement the proposals under resolution 1.

Away With All Your Superstitions: A set of conference resolutions

By Carl Kenner (Adelaide branch)

In the words of the Internationale:
"Away with all your superstitions
Servile masses arise, arise
We'll change henceforth the old tradition
And spurn the dust to win the prize."

Being the scientific materialists that we are, and to bring our policies more into line with our ideology, here are some health policies I want to put forward to the national conference. Please research these topics prior to the conference so you can see why rationalism is important, and that these policies are a reflection of modern scientific knowledge. I'm not confident that people will want to accept them all on block, so I've broken them up into resolutions to be voted on independently. That way people can, for example, vote not to promote health fraud but not to oppose it either, or vote to hold on to their particular prejudice while opposing other people's. These resolutions are intended to be added to our health policy, but may be re-worded or occasionally left out of our propaganda where appropriate.

Resolution 1: Remove references to "alternative therapies" from our policies.

We support the extension of Medicare to all facets of health care, but only to treatments that have been shown to be safe and effective. This does not include the majority of "alternative therapies". As such we will remove all references to extending Medicare to cover "alternative therapies" from our policies. This includes our "Health Charter", "Money for Medicare, not war", "Resolution on Healthcare" from the 2004 conference, and "Universal, Free, Quality Health Care" from the 2003 conference.

Resolution 2: There is no alternative to medical science.

The Socialist Alliance recognizes that there is no alternative to medical science. All therapies must obey the laws of physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics in order to be effective. There is no such thing as chi (aka qi, ki, doshas, prana, fohat, orgone, odic force, mana, etheric energy, or life-force) or the "meridians" it supposedly flows along. Diluting makes chemicals weaker rather than stronger. People do not have magical auras. There is no such thing as healing energy. Body parts are not mapped onto other body parts. Psychic powers do not exist and cannot heal. Subluxation of the spine is not the cause of most disease and can't be healed by a chiropractor.

Resolution 3: Prosecute health fraud.

We recognize that health fraud is no different from any other kind of fraud. There should be no exception to consumer protection legislation for fake medical treatments. Alternative medicine should not be above the law. The same laws that ban defective and ineffective products from being sold or advertised should apply to medicine. We completely oppose the buyer-beware attitude of consumer protection, and place all responsibility for proving the effectiveness of a product on the companies selling and producing the product.

Resolution 4: Support fluoridation of water supply.

We support the fluoridation of the water supply as a preventative treatment for costly dental health problems.

Resolution 5: Defend vaccination.

Vaccination is an essential preventative measure. Its enormous benefits far outweigh the miniscule risks. We wholeheartedly support vaccination and defend it from the anti-vaccination lobby.

Resolution 6: Reject AIDS conspiracy theories.

AIDS is caused by the HIV virus which developed naturally in western Africa. Condoms are an effective and essential preventative measure against HIV, unlike abstinence programs which are not effective. Folk remedies for aids such as the raping of virgins are abhorrent and should be stamped out. Conventional scientific medicine is the only way to deal with the AIDS epidemic.

Resolution 7: Support and defend stem-cell research.

We support and defend stem cell research. We oppose attempts to restrict it from using human embryos.

Resolution 8: Support animal testing.

Animal testing is an absolutely vital part of medical research. We expect that all medical treatments should undergo testing on animals. Animal testing is no worse than eating meat or the conditions animals endure in farming, and is far more beneficial to humanity. We defend scientists' right to conduct tests on animals without harassment.

Resolution 9: Multiple Chemical Sensitivity is psychological.

We recognise that "Multiple Chemical Sensitivity" usually has a psychological cause rather than a chemical one.

Resolution 10: Support and defend the view that cigarette smoke is dangerous to your health.

Cigarette smoke is a health risk regardless of whether you are inhaling it deliberately or are exposed to it as part of your work environment. We support anti-passive-smoking legislation to protect workers' health.

2005 National Conference arrangements

The May 8 National Executive meeting unanimously agreed that:

1. The 2005 national conference delegate ratio be 1 to 13.
2. The 2005 national conference delegate registration fee be \$135.
3. That the 2005 national conference theme be: "Uniting for a better world. For peace, justice and socialism"
4. That SA host New Zealand comrades Mike Treen from the Unite Workers Union and Grant Morgan from NZ Socialist Worker and Residents Action Movement, to attend both the National Trade Union Fightback Conference and the SA National Conference.

New branch launched in Ballarat

At its May 8 meeting, the National Executive voted unanimously to ratify the formation on April 21 of a new branch of the Socialist Alliance in Ballarat, Victoria, and to convey congratulations to the comrades in the branch.

[Ballarat branch can be contacted at ballarat@socialist-alliance.org]