

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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NOTE: The next issue of Alliance Voices will be published after the 2005 National Conference

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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.

Is it a question of leadership? A reply to Lisa Macdonald's contribution

By Lalitha Chelliah (Non-affiliate National Co-Convenor)

The resignation of a non-affiliate NE member from Tasmania has created this debate [see *Alliance Voices* Vol 5 No 6] and it has implications on many fronts. The important thing is to make sure that it is put into its correct perspective and context.

I rang Linda Seaborn a week before the submission of her letter of notification that she was joining the DSP. It was by sheer accident that I discovered that the non-affiliate from Tasmania had decided now become a member of an affiliate. When I asked about this I was told by Lisa that she had been asked about this by Linda a week before my phone call to Linda. All this is to inform comrades of the sequence of events that took place that were later subject to interpretation.

Many questions arose because of this communication. How long had the DSP known about Linda's pending membership of their organisation? When had the DSP intended to inform the SA NC about the matter? It was clear from the exchanges that had taken place, that it was an important issue with implications for the NE and SA.

One answer (in the form of a question) given was: When should the affiliate inform the NC of Linda's membership? The DSP has a two-tiered membership system where Linda would have to be a provisional member before becoming a full member. Did the DSP want to wait till she became a full member before informing the SA NC? One does not know. In any case the membership system of the DSP is not of concern to SA. When a situation develops where many such question arise it gives way to suspicion and a lack of trust and goes as far as raising the question of honesty. This is not good comradely behaviour in an organisation, like SA, that talks about transparency and openness.

Linda Seaborn or any other SA member have every right to join any organisation they choose to. It is not a question of such rights. It only became a question of rights in this case, when a NE member who was elected on the basis of being a non-affiliate decided to join an affiliate.

Affiliates' NE members are elected by their groups and represent their groups within SA. Non-affiliates are elected by the SA conference as a whole and then ratified by the relevant state conference. In other words the whole of SA elects the non-affiliates NE members. They represent SA and not any particular group although they are seen as an expression of non-affiliate views. When such a person decides to join a group/affiliates s/he immediately comes under the discipline of that particular group and will then only represent that group and its view, which may or may not coincide with SA views. As far as I am concerned, this is where the problem began and that was the basis on which, I believe, that the non-affiliate NC members and David Glanz, took a decision to ask for Linda Seaborn's resignation from the NE.

At the NE that followed, it was argued by the DSP leadership that Linda Seaborn's leadership qualities will be wasted and she has to be respected as member of the leadership of SA. Fair point comrades and there is no argument on that point. Linda Seaborn was on 3 leadership bodies. She was a member of the GLW-SA board, a member of the SA building and membership committee as well as being a member of the NE. No one had asked her to give up her leadership positions on the other 2 committees. The argument about not respecting or recognizing her leadership qualities is false.

The NE was an important body where representations were crucial to maintain a balance between the various groups and affiliates and non-affiliates and as Lisa had pointed out, the constitution was very specific on that question of representation. It is worth noting that the DSP and the then NAC leadership had agreed on that formula. It may be that that formula is problematic now, but what was the rush, about 6 weeks before the national conference, to force an issue that could have waited till the conference. Linda would have missed 2 NE meetings. Does this indicate that we reject Linda's leadership qualities? I hardly think so. At the upcoming national conference Linda could have easily stood for the NE position again and given her record, would have had no problems getting on as a DSP NE member.

The NE at which Linda stayed (with the support of the numbers) in effect became non-constitutional if the formula had been strictly applied. Given that the NE is the highest decision making body one can argue it was all above board. This makes it even more interesting because even the bourgeoisie got to a referendum when a constitutional change is required comrades and that is worth thinking about.

It took several weeks to replace the last non-affiliate NE member who resigned and the decision by the NE to increase the numbers meant that non-affiliate NE members had to be sought in a hurry by various state executive members to make up the numbers. Unfortunately comrades it all came down to a numbers game.

So, where is the political leadership question?

The points raised by Lisa about "affiliate camps" and "non affiliate camps" is a false one. Any member as I have explained before, who belongs to an affiliate is confined to that affiliate's caucus discipline whereas the non affiliates generally cast a conscience vote based on the issue at hand. There is a major difference comrades. If one affiliate has the majority of NE members, then SA as whole is subject to that affiliate's decisions. Affiliates do not make decisions in consultation with the SA membership (except the ones who have dual membership). They make decisions within their affiliate organisations then take it to SA meetings. One only has to take note of the way the affiliate members vote on leadership bodies because they do not break ranks. Good discipline comrades, but not a good example of how decisions should be made in SA.

The leadership structure of course needs to be changed as it has its problems but the arguments put forward by Lisa has its own problems and has to be considered with great caution. The important issue for me is that over the last few years the leadership structures in SA have been decided upon between the leaders of various groups then sold to the membership. This time round I would like to see a discussion that involves all the members of SA from conception to the end. It would be good to have several models that are discussed by branches and caucuses before taking a decision. This may take time and may not be possible at this upcoming conference but it is crucial that we take this question very seriously as it may be one that may make or break SA.

Knowing your onions - some background notes on SA leadership

By Dave Riley (Brisbane Central/Northern branch and member of the National Executive)

In an organisation such as ours, because we don't have a road map to guide us, there is a commendable active culture of experimentation as we explore different ways to do things. That's what an evolving process is all about. It moves forward by 'do then see' - trying to make our project progress as best we can manage.

But to do that we need to be aware of what the current situation is. This applies equally to the question of leadership in the Alliance as it does to any other aspect of our activity.

The present situation

?? The structure of the national executive is an artefact from the days when the Alliance was an occasional electoral coalition primarily of "x" number of affiliates. We realised two years ago that we are no longer simply that as the great bulk of the SA membership are not members of these groups. But that hasn't stopped us continuing to empower these groups (most of whom are quite small) with consequential status on our national body.

?? These same affiliates - except the Democratic Socialist Perspective - have implacably opposed the decision at our last two national conferences to proceed in a partyish direction. Over the last two-year period, these formations have engineered a factional bloc on the National Executive in order to roll back or warp any initiatives that advance the Alliance in this democratically arrived at direction. This approach by them has fostered an intense factional atmosphere on the National Executive that has distorted all our deliberations.

?? At the present time most of these affiliates are not active in the national work of the SA. They speak and vote at NE hook-ups and that is about it. There has been a similar, if more uneven, disengagement by them from SA work at the local, district and state level - except in Wills, which they would have us believe is the "model branch".(1)

?? Due to the political baggage that we have projected onto the National Executive - artefacts, as I suggest, from past modes of the Alliance - the presumption has grown that our national leadership body should function as a senate. This assumption - that the NE should be a place of review and not leadership - has fostered the creation of two Alliances - one that is ordained to make decisions and another whose role it is to put them into practice. The consequence of this disjunction is that the day to day active work of the SA is marginalised from National Executive deliberations such that the latter become rarefied discourses without much connection to the work at the coal face.

?? Despite the promise 12 months ago, the participation of non-aligned members in our present National Executive has been very uneven. The drop out rate has been significant, and there have been limited attempts among this same levy of non-aligned members to take responsibility for or participate in the national work of the Alliance.

?? Over the past 12 months the only non-aligned members of our present National Executive who have been active in the Alliance's national work on a regular basis outside the occasional NE gathering (that I know of) have been the three non-aligned national convenors, myself, Linda Seaborn, Alex Miller and Humphrey McQueen. The same drop off and failure to participate in the national tasks to hand also occurred on the 12-member SA-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board elected at the last conference.

?? When we polled SA branches recently, collecting information for our organisational report, we found that of approximately 900 non-aligned members in the Alliance very few had stepped forward to assume key leadership roles at any level over the past 12 months. Our problem is that not many non-aligned members of SA are prepared right now to serve on leadership bodies. That isn't the same as saying that non-aligned comrades aren't active in the SA - but the task of leading the Alliance at all levels has fallen to other shoulders - and primarily that has been the dedicated members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective.

The alternative

As you see from the resolutions before conference our leadership structure proposal (2) promotes a straightforward method of determining who should lead us. Essentially, I think, we should break from the entrenched factional culture that is crippling the work of the Alliance, and turn instead to electing the best leadership we can manage from among our *whole membership*.

When we elect such a leadership, one whose genesis is in step with the way we elect it in our localities, we can begin to get the leadership we deserve rather than force it to be ruled by abstract schemas.

The problem with the leadership perspective being promoted by the non-aligned national co-convenors is that it accommodates the worst features of our recent history and sentences the SA to forever being a combination of "x" number of certified factions (such as the Non-Aligned Caucus (3)), separate from one another regardless of political viewpoint. It embraces a rigid warring camp model for the SA by seeding all our future deliberations with the politics of

distrust then formulating that as a constitutional leadership requisite. An apartheid-like system of political segregation *rather than integration* would become the guiding precept governing all affiliate activity in the SA (4).

The non-aligned conveners' leadership perspective also tries to impose regulatory electoral methods on the National Executive that are not followed more generally in the Alliance for the simple reason that we know, from our own collective experience, that they don't work. So while we trust one kind of leadership to lead us at the locality level, nationally we are being asked to format it by a different rule set.

Elsewhere, among formations which may be similar to our own - like Respect/the Unity Coalition, the English Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party - no such constitutional prescriptions operate (5), without any apparent harm to their pluralism or their deliberating processes.

Any leadership formula has to serve many functions because it has to work the best we can manage between conferences fulfilling any number of requisites. We nonetheless need to have confidence in its ability to work. The present body, engineered around rigid levies, does not do that.

There are many ways we can seed our leadership body with attributes we think it should possess. That's why we need to be able to select individual leaders who we think possess the attributes we want reflected on the NE. That's what a nominating process is all about - sifting through many candidates to determine the sort of leadership we want to see elected. That doesn't mean that the majority of the membership of such a body isn't made up of people who aren't members of the various affiliates and it doesn't mean that affiliates aren't represented on such a body (6). What it *does* mean is by dint of the criteria each conference delegate decides upon they elect the leadership they think will do best by the Alliance without the constitution prescribing in advance who that leader can or cannot be.

Our original leadership proposal has been circulated widely in the Alliance and we are still open for feedback. Already we have made some changes in response to some of the suggestions we have received and these are laid out in an accompanying article in this issue of *Alliance Voices*. Any further feedback can be sent to me at dhell2@optusnet.com.au.

Footnotes:

(1) A separate concentration process has also occurred. For example, of the 32 branches in the Socialist Alliance, five members of the same branch, Wills in inner-city Melbourne, are affiliate representatives on our present National Executive because so many of the small affiliates are concentrated in that one branch. Approximately 30 of the listed members, out of a total of 80-90 in Wills, are also members of affiliates. This comprises almost all the small affiliate membership in the whole of Victoria. This is the context of where the "Wills model" for the SA comes from.

(2) "A proposal for Socialist Alliance's national leadership structure" by Lisa Macdonald (National Co-convenor) and Dave Riley (National Executive member), *Alliance Voices* Vol 5 No 5, May 2005, p28. http://www.socialist-alliance.org/resources/idb/av_vol5_no5.doc

(3) The cornerstone of the non-aligned conveners' leadership proposition is to conscript all elected non-aligned National Executive members into their Non Aligned Caucus whether they want to be part of that permanent faction or not .

(4) *Segregation in practice I*: the example of Linda Seaborn. According to the non-aligned national convenors any NE member who joins one of the affiliates should be automatically expelled from that leadership body regardless of their contribution to the ongoing work of the Alliance or the democratic wish of all those delegates who voted for them at the preceding national conference. In Linda's case two successive national conferences wanted her on our NE. The non-aligned national convenors and David Glanz wanted her off.

Segregation in practice II: the June 2004 example of myself and Andrew Watson. Both of us were dropped from any collaborative relationship after expressing differences with the Non-Aligned Caucus's trajectory on this very question of exclusivity. We later learnt as a consequence of this one disagreement, by dint of a privately retailed slur, that our apparent crime - warranting our segregation, despite our non-aligned status and ongoing independent activity in the SA - was that we were "tools" of the DSP (see: Where did NAC go wrong? by Andrew Watson in *Alliance Voices* Vol 5 No 5, May 2005. http://www.socialist-alliance.org/resources/idb/av_vol5_no5.doc)

(5) Although, the Welsh Socialist Alliance limits single affiliate representation to 40% of those elected from conference.

(6) The Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system we propose be used to elect the National Executive is a form of proportional representation, which we employ to elect conference delegates in the branches. This system guarantees that minorities can be elected by allowing voters to rank individual candidates in the order of their choice. Thus, if a voter's first choice among the candidates receives more than enough votes to win, the surplus proportion of that vote will be transferred to that voter's second or succeeding (next-highest ranking) choice. Alternatively, if a voter's first choice candidate is eliminated, that vote instead will be cast for the voter's second or succeeding (next-highest ranking) choice. In comparison all that *plurality* means is the number of votes for the candidate receiving the greatest number (but less than half of the votes).

New challenges for Socialist Alliance

By Peter Boyle (Marrickville branch, and member of the National Executives of the Socialist Alliance and the affiliated Democratic Socialist Perspective)

Like many other comrades, I felt very proud to be a Socialist Alliance member when I read the headline "Freed militant unionist wants PM ousted", in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, announcing the release from prison of our comrade Craig Johnston. There was also "Freed unionist relishes prospect of a new battle", in *The Age* and "Militant unionist out of jail and off to 'war'" in *The Australian*.

The next day it was the turn of another Socialist Alliance leader in the trade union movement, Geelong Trades and Labour Council secretary Tim Gooden, who led 400 Geelong workers and members of the local community into a

protest that forced PM John Howard (who had just announced his vicious new anti-working class laws) to run away. (All these stories are available on <www.socialist-alliance.org>)

In Western Australia, SA national executive member and state MUA secretary Chris Cain was also in the local news as the resident militant union leader.

It has been an inspiration to follow the steady progress of the campaign for mass delegate meetings but in one week it seemed to jump to a new level. We've built something quite amazing. The Socialist Alliance is probably the only left regroupment project in a wealthy country to take off without an electoral break. All around the world there are people who admire us for just this. The rise of the Greens as the major parliamentary party to the left of the ALP has placed a major electoral break out of our reach - for the moment. But the Greens don't fill all that political space and the Alliance has made real gains.

? We have more than 1,000 paid-up members and 32 branches - more than any socialist group in this country has had for decades.

? We have begun organizing in areas where the organized left never reached or had long abandoned.

? Our trade union activists are working closely with militant trade unionists to build a campaign of mass community and industrial action against the Howard government's impending new wave of attacks on unions. On June 11 trade union leaders and rank and file activists from around the country will be gathering at the National Union Fightback Conference (see <<http://www.socialist-alliance.org/page.php?page=415>>) in Melbourne. This could very well be the Alliance's single most important initiative.

? Socialist Alliance is widely seen as the party most responsible for the anti-war movement and some of our members are well respected in the refugee rights movement.

? By initiating *Seeing Red*, the magazine of social, political and cultural dissent (see <<http://www.seeing-red.org/>>), the Alliance has begun to draw left-wing writers, thinkers and artists into a common project. It is not clear if this project is financially viable (somebody with dosh hit the donate button quick!), but the first three issues have been impressive.

If Socialist Alliance can persist and develop in strength and political effectiveness, its real activist leadership in Australia will find an electoral expression. Stephen Jolly's election as a councillor in the inner-suburban Melbourne shows this may not be far off.

We all seem to support these initiatives and we don't seem to have much problem agreeing on our general political positions on this or that issue. (The differences on the ALP are being exaggerated, as we have had very little difficulty in implementing a common approach towards ALP members and party bodies "on the ground"). Instead our disagreements are mainly on internal processes and different ideas about how to organise the Alliance.

Multi-tendency socialist party

The 2003 and 2004 Socialist Alliance national conferences voted by large majorities to begin transforming the Socialist Alliance into a multi-tendency socialist party (MTSP).

Democratic Socialist Perspective members threw our weight into trying to build the Socialist Alliance as the new united party of the left. We hoped these measures would help build the Alliance into a new united party of the left that could intervene more effectively in the trade union and other social movements, as well as participate in elections.

However, all of the smaller founding socialist affiliate groups have remained implacably opposed to the MTSP perspective. And while they are a small minority in SA as a whole this opposition presents a bigger image of disunity in the left activist milieus in the bigger cities.

Now we have a division in this "pro-MTSP" camp. The three national convenors who don't belong to any affiliate group, Louise Walker, Lalitha Chelliah and Raul Bassi, have declared a "third way" to that of the International Socialist Organisation and other smaller affiliates (which, they say, want the Alliance to be an electoral united front, like Respect in England) and that of the DSP, which is accused of trying to force the Alliance to follow the Scottish Socialist Party model.

Walker has characterised the SSP "model" as one "where small socialist groups of highly politically developed activists of various strands, including individual active socialists, group together at the centre of the organisation and steer it, while other socialists who are not highly politically developed activists or who do not wish to commit to steering such an organisation with other socialists, again have certainty of little more in the way of a political home that they can influence the direction of, that broadly reflects their political ideas, and can be integrated into their lives..." (*Alliance Voices* Vol 6 No 6). But this misrepresents both the SSP regroupment and the DSP's approach to building the Alliance.

SSP members democratically elect the people they have confidence in to lead the party. Proportional representation guarantees minority representation and it has adopted measures to ensure gender balance in leadership bodies. If many of its leaders are revolutionary socialists they were elected by and have the confidence of the broader membership.

No models

Many Alliance members (not just in the DSP) have drawn great inspiration from the SSP. It is a great example of left regroupment. However, not for a moment have we seen it as some sort of model that can be replicated in Australia.

We don't have the strong historical socialist tradition that exists in Scotland. We don't face the same national question and we didn't have the poll tax campaign and Tommy Sheridan. We don't have the same electoral openings.

But we did have the 1998 MUA struggle and there was the rise of a new militant minority in the trade union movement after that, mainly in the industrial heartlands of Victoria. Some of this militant minority's best known

leaders, including former AMWU Victorian secretary Craig Johnston (who has been jailed for leading industrial action), are proud members of SA.

Other SA union activists have won leadership positions. Chris Cain was elected WA secretary of the MUA and Tim Gooden was recently elected secretary of the Geelong Trades and Labour Council.

And today, as Howard gets ready to brutally exploit his control of both houses of parliament, we are being reminded of just how critical this militant section of the trade union movement is to the confidence of all the social movements.

I'd argue that the DSP's approach to left regroupment has been built around the real openings in Australia and is not some attempt to copy an "SSP model". At all levels, the Alliance has experimented with organisational forms and continues to do so. And we are prepared to adjust our perspectives in the light of collective experience and discussion.

The Socialist Alliance has come a certain way but perhaps right now the right thing to do is to find a way to open up the Alliance to the real openings for regroupment with the thousands militant trade unionists and other progressive activists. Perhaps we should consider a new, more popular, name like "Solidarity First" or "Unite!" or even, as others may suggest, "Respect"!

I hope we can begin a constructive perspectives discussion around this challenge at the national conference.

For democratic leadership

The "third way" proponents seem to be arguing that SA cannot become a truly broad socialist party unless we keep the factional deal-based leadership system which was adopted last year. This formula decrees a "non-affiliate" majority for national leadership bodies.

While any group of Alliance members has the freedom to organise themselves in tendencies, factions or caucuses, the "third way" envisages a special status for one such grouping. According to a letter to the DSP by Louise Walker, Lalitha Chelliah and Raul Bassi (*Alliance Voices* Vol 5 No 5), the "Non-Aligned Caucus" (which is to consist of all non-affiliated members of the SA national executive and national political committees, working groups, caucuses and boards), is to be "structurally located as a central leadership wing within the national organisation of the Alliance".¹ The NAC-initiated leadership formula, which the DSP supported at the 2004 Alliance national conference, has been tested this year and it has failed to provide an effective national executive. It has also failed to fulfil its declared purpose of bringing forward new leadership.

What it has done is promote greater disunity in SA and alienated its leadership bodies from the real Alliance work at the base. The experiences of many Alliance branches are never reflected in NE discussions. And most disturbingly, it has begun to promote a "red-baiting" atmosphere in the form of an institutionalised suspicion of Alliance members who belong to revolutionary socialist affiliates or are even seen to support such affiliates.

In the four years of its existence, Socialist Alliance has succeed in growing in this not-too-socialist country because, on the whole, we have met three challenges:

?? We have jumped to meet the real political openings, helping build the movements of resistance to the capitalist neo-liberal attacks, which would be much weaker without our work.

?? We have maintained a democratic spirit and method of operation which has always looked to build consensus or the largest possible majorities for decisions.

?? And we have developed our structures to enable the maximum involvement of SA members and which also helps develop a real leadership, trusted and supported by them.

The challenge of our fourth national conference is to continue this process—to work out how Socialist Alliance can best occupy the political space available to it and how we need to evolve our structures to make the Alliance's work as effective as possible in the new political phase. The false and misleading debate over "models" introduced by the NAC conveners simply diverts us from getting to grips with this real challenge.

This new round of factionalism has also distracted the attention of the Alliance's leadership bodies away from the urgent struggle in the movements. It is almost as if there are two Alliances. There are the Socialist Alliance members who are getting on with the job, whether it is in a local branch, a trade union caucus, an anti-war caucus or a working group around a project like *Seeing Red* or *SA-Green Left Weekly* engagement. Then there is this over-factionalised national leadership that seems to be focused on internal processes, making rules and even trying to censor the working bodies of the Alliance.

Our general experience in the Alliance is that where comrades from different political backgrounds actually attempt to work together on a project, mutual trust and respect is built. And there is no problem finding political projects where we are in broad agreement. Indeed, there have been no major disagreements about our political platform or our work in the trade unions or in the other social movements.

DSP rebadged?

Like other DSP members, I have a great emotional stake in the Alliance surviving and developing. This is because we have been enthusiastic builders of this project. Does anybody dispute this?

But perhaps in doing so we have made a rod for our own back. When other affiliate groups have abstained or pulled back from this or that SA project, DSP members and non-affiliate members who have worked alongside us have time and time again ended up minding the store. Then we are accused by some of turning the Alliance into a "rebadged DSP". Sometimes other Socialist Alliance members minding the store with us are accused by some of being "DSP tools" or "dupes".

The Socialist Alliance is not the “DSP rebadged”. This is not just an insult to SA members but is totally false. The Alliance is a much looser and broader organisation than the DSP and it is united on a more limited political program than that which unites DSP members. The DSP respects the broad socialist character of the Alliance but we have never hidden the revolutionary socialist perspective that we seek to win others in and outside the Alliance to.

DSP members take heavy responsibility in the Alliance. Without the DSP there would not be *Seeing Red, Alliance Voices*, the Alliance's trade union initiatives like the National Trade Union Fightback Conference, etc. The Alliance without the DSP will be little more than a loose electoral alliance between small socialist groups concentrated in Sydney and Melbourne.

In large part due to the heavy load the DSP carries in the work of Socialist Alliance, the DSP is now facing a severe financial crisis for the second year in a row. The *Green Left Weekly* project, our biggest responsibility, will be jeopardized if we carry on like this. This is too big an asset for the left and progressive movement in this country to risk. So we have written to the Alliance national executive to tell them that the DSP simply cannot meet this and sustain its current level of resource commitment to Socialist Alliance. We hope others in the Alliance will step forward to take more of this strain.

The rising factionalism in the debate leading up to this national conference should concern anyone who values what we have collectively built up over the last few years through the Socialist Alliance. It will be a tragedy if this latest round of factionalism ends up destroying hard-won gains. And this could happen. It is always easier to smash up than to build a regroupment project.

The Socialist Alliance's big challenge today is to face up to the real openings for regroupment with the thousands militant trade unionists and other progressive activists and to break from the unhealthy inter-factional suspicion that has for too long dogged the left. I urge you to support proposals for a democratically elected leadership, with provisions to ensure minority representation and a guaranteed say from all states. We need to defend democracy, pluralism and unity in action in the Socialist Alliance if it is to move forward.

Footnote

i. NAC was the name used at the 2003 conference by a group of SA members, not belonging to any affiliate group, who united behind a call for the Alliance to become a MTSP. But it is very unclear just who NAC is today because some of those signatories do not support the “third way” course of the three national convenors, as Andrew Watson's contribution in *Alliance Voices* Vol. 5 No. 5 makes shows.

Corrections to my contribution to Alliance Voices No 6

By Craig Hall (Wills branch)

I wish you to publish my retraction of paragraph three in my contribution [in *Alliance Voices*, Vol 5 No 6]. It is on cancer and animal testing which, and I quote: "casts serious doubt[s] on the validity of cigarette-lung cancer theory." After reviewing all of the data that I have at hand in respect to animal testing and cancer research, I would strike the findings in denial of cigarette-lung cancer theory completely out of the ball park. Of course lung cancer has been proven without doubt to be directly connected to cigarette smoking. I was wrong to make it a part of my argument that the SA not support animal testing. This very grave inaccuracy made by myself should not be used to discredit the rest of my argument.

Another point I wish to clear up is my inaccurate use of the words: "eight resolutions." What I meant was the 8th resolution in Kenner's 10 resolutions.

Finally, in the sixth last paragraph states that Kenner : "...shows a singular lack of ignorance...". This is contradicted by the rest of my argument. What I wish noted is that the last part of the sixth paragraph should say: "...shows a singular ignorance...".

Unity against the Liberals. For a pluralist Alliance

The Australian working class is facing an offensive by the Liberals on many fronts - workers' rights, welfare rights, the further privatisation of education and health, and of Telstra, women's right to control their bodies, and the rights of indigenous people to determine their future.

Yet there is scant indication from Labor that it intends to provide an alternative, let alone play a role in mobilising resistance. Labor is toying with accepting AWAs and is opposed to repealing the Workplace Relations Act.

It is wedded to middle class welfare, such as private health subsidies. Incoming party president Warren Mundine, on the other hand, has declared that access to welfare (by the poor) is a privilege, not a right, and advocates privatising communally owned indigenous land. And Bomber Beazley is for strengthening the US alliance, dropping all critical reference to the invasion and occupation of Iraq.

In the era of neo-liberalism, the disagreements between the Labor leadership and the Liberals are largely over details, not principles. Yet millions of Labor voters want an alternative based on the needs of their families, friends and neighbours, an alternative that taxes the rich, that puts resources into Medicare and education rather than war.

This is the political space that makes the Socialist Alliance project possible. It is the same political space that, with local variations, has opened the way in Europe for the successes of radical left formations such as the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark, the Left Bloc in Portugal, Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, the Scottish Socialist Party, Respect in England and Wales, and others.

But we, the undersigned, also argue that identifying that space is not the same as filling it. The success of the Socialist Alliance is not guaranteed, and there are other forces, principally the Greens, trying to stake out an alternative around these kinds of concerns.

We therefore believe that in the run-up to the Socialist Alliance conference, members and branches need to have a sober assessment of our achievements and our failings - a discussion grounded in the reality of our experience rather than in any grandiose notion of the Alliance already being the left alternative to Labor.

We need, for example, to draw up a balance sheet of our federal election campaign and results, given that the membership and branch life has not even now fully recovered from the twin disappointments of another Howard win and poor Alliance results.

We need to discuss through the conflicting lessons of other electoral experiences. Why did we score 11 per cent in one election (Moreland Council in Melbourne) and 0.07 per cent in another (WA upper house)?

What role can affiliate publications play in advancing the Alliance project, given the lacklustre experience with the Socialist Alliance-Green Left Weekly collaboration? What kind of publications does the Alliance need to have in its own name and what are the resources to make such proposals possible?

Alliance members have done excellent union and anti-war work over the past year. How do we integrate this with branch life and election work?

In our opinion, the Alliance has suffered because these challenges have not been discussed and debated through in a political way. Instead of political clarification, the Alliance majority leadership substitutes a series of organisational changes that create the illusion of progress while masking our weaknesses.

Our first task has to be to establish a political way forward for the Alliance. We do not pretend to have all the answers. But we feel a starting point can be found in three propositions:

?? We need a united front approach to both the Labor and Green parties and their members and supporters. Faced with the Liberal offensive, there is major desire for unity among workers. The Socialist Alliance can win respect by being the best force for unity in action. This does not mean holding our tongues: unity in action creates political space for us to place demands on Labor (and Greens) to act against the Liberals, and for us to put forward our honest disagreements and our alternative. Disheartened Labor supporters will listen to us as allies, not cringe from us as critics.

?? We need unity in action in our union and anti-war work, too. While Alliance members have done valuable work, we should not big-note ourselves as the leaders of the movements. We need to understand that the Liberals' attacks can push even the Right of the union movement into action - and that a call for action, however limited, from the established union leaders is currently a thousand times more powerful than our best-written Alliance flyer. There is an important place for Alliance initiatives, such as the excellent Fightback conference. But while we need audacity, we need humility too.

?? We need a Socialist Alliance that works in a spirit of pluralism. As the Alliance project has stalled, there has been a worrying trend towards the scapegoating of affiliates or individuals. There is a drift towards a "crash through or crash" mentality. We are worried, for example, that leading members of the SA-GLW editorial board have suggested that the incoming board be composed solely of Alliance members who agree with one particular vision of how to build the Alliance.

This document is intended to start a debate, not close it. But we would put forward some simple propositions for an Alliance strategy for the coming year:

?? Unity against the Liberals around union work. (We want to be known as the uniters, not the dividers.)

?? Unity around anti-war, refugee and indigenous rights work, etc.

?? Prepare where appropriate for serious intervention into elections (fund-raising, political preparation, etc).

?? For a relaxed and comradesly internal atmosphere.

?? For a plural leadership that respects differences.

David Glanz, national co-convenor; Alison Thorne, national executive; Ken Davis, national executive; Greg Adler, national executive; Luke Deer, national executive; Juliet Edeson, national executive; Melanie Lazarow, Victorian co-convenor; Peter Murray, Victorian state executive; Anne Picot, member of the SA-GLW editorial board; Wade McDonald, WA state co-treasurer; Judy McVey, member of National Trade Union Committee, former state and council candidate, Wills branch; Mick Myles, former federal candidate, Brisbane South-West branch; Terry Costello, convenor, SA CPSU caucus, Vic; Tom Orsag, former Victorian co-convenor; Marcus Banks, Wills branch executive; Simone Cornwall, Perth Hills branch; Brian Webb, former council candidate, Eastern Suburbs branch; Peter Carter, Wills branch; Brigitte Ellery, Geelong branch; Craig Hall, Wills branch; Alan Woodcraft, Fremantle branch; Jarvis Ryan, Eastern Suburbs branch; Rebecca Lemay, Sydney Central branch; Heidi Spillane, Eastern Suburbs branch; Bruce Knobloch, Marrickville branch; Henk Eijkman, Wills branch.

If you want to add your name to this document, email dglanz@optusnet.com.au or ring 0418 316 310.

"The Third Way": a road to nowhere

By Alex Miller (Non-affiliated member of the National Executive and GLW-SA Editorial Board)

In a prepared speech to the Socialist Alliance National Executive on May 22nd 2005 (reprinted in *Alliance Voice* Vol. 5 No. 6), Comrade Louise Walker argued that there are currently three models on offer on how to carry the SA left

regroupment process forward. One is that of a United Electoral Front along the lines of the RESPECT electoral coalition in England. I am not concerned with this model in this note, though there is obviously a lot to be said about it.

The second model identified by Comrade Walker, and attributed to the DSP, is that of the Scottish Socialist Party style Multi-Tendency Socialist Party (MTSP) “where small socialist groups of highly politically developed activists of various strands, including individual active socialists, group together at the centre of the organisation and steer it”. Comrade Walker, and also the other non-aligned national co-convenors, Comrades Lalitha Chelliah and Raul Bassi, believe that this model will fail if it is pursued in the contemporary Australian scene.

As against these two models, Comrade Walker proposes a “third way” of carrying out the MTSP project, a way that is outlined in the correspondence between the non-aligned national convenors and the DSP leadership recently published in *Alliance Voices*.

In this brief note I wish to argue that Comrades Walker, Chelliah, and Bassi are mistaken in a number of their assertions. The issues require a fuller treatment than I am able to provide here, so this note should be read as a brief precursor to the fuller discussion on perspectives for SA that will take place at the 2005 national conference.

The first point to be made is that there is no “SSP Model”. If the SSP is a party of “small socialist groups of highly politically developed activists of various strands, including individual active socialists, [who] group together at the centre of the organisation and steer it” this is not because of the SSP’s following some preconceived model of what a Multi-Tendency Socialist Party should be like, but rather a direct outcome of the SSP’s internal democracy, governed by the principles of one-member one-vote and proportional representation.

Is it a surprise, given the SSP’s internal democracy, that the SSP is led by “highly politically developed activists of various strands”? Not at all. It is not in the least surprising that it is the members with the highest level of activism, energy, and political experience who earn the respect and confidence of the broad membership and get elected on to the leadership bodies of the SSP. If you have a problem with the fact that the SSP is a party of “small socialist groups of highly politically developed activists of various strands who group together at the centre of the organisation and steer it”, take it up with the broad membership of the SSP!

How has this fact about the SSP impacted on the SSP’s capacity to recruit and retain members? If Comrades Walker, Chelliah and Bassi are to be believed, this should have resulted in a disaster in terms of recruitment and retention of the broad SSP membership. But the facts simply fail to bear this out.

The SSP currently has around 3000 members (not taking into account the 10% increase in membership gained during the recent UK election campaign), where the **monthly** membership fee is 12 pounds, or roughly 30 Australian dollars. The SSP’s internal democratic culture thus appears to have been a great success in building the base for a mass MTSP in Scotland.

What does the “third way” offered by Comrades Walker, Chelliah and Bassi have to counterpose to the internal democratic culture of the SSP? Instead of drawing less active comrades into higher levels of political struggle by convincing them politically to take up their share of the vast workload of the Alliance and providing concrete, practical inspiration and leadership, what we are offered is rather an attempt to solve our problem of low levels of activism and engagement by many Alliance members by imposing a bureaucratic quota.

This became clear in the recent discussion in the SA National Executive about whether Comrade Linda Seaborn should in effect be expelled from the National Executive because, in joining the DSP, she had changed the balance of aligned versus non-aligned members on the National Executive. Comrades Walker, Chelliah and Bassi voted in favour of the expulsion of Comrade Seaborn from the National Executive. I voted against it, as (thankfully) did a majority of members of the NE. This incident is highly instructive: there was a proposal that a good, hard-working, highly active comrade should be expelled from a Socialist Alliance leadership body on the grounds that her newly chosen political affiliation clashed with a particular interpretation of a rule requiring at all times a majority of non-aligned members on the NE.

To my mind, this whole discussion amounted to a *reductio ad absurdum* of the national non-affiliated co-convenors’ interpretation of the rules. Moreover, the “third way” proposed by these comrades appears to be a globalised version of the approach that demanded Comrade Seaborn’s expulsion from the NE. Leadership is not to be the organic outcome of the workings of full democracy, but of “affirmative action” where, by the application of an abstract schema, less active members of SA are to be assured dominance in the leadership bodies and working groups of Socialist Alliance. *If this is not what is meant by engineering “a collectively engaged non-affiliated leadership, structurally related as the second pole of support for the MTSP”, what does it mean?*

In my view, this would lead to disaster: you cannot build an MTSP by applying an abstract principle. The same argument applies to the issue about the composition of the GLW-SA editorial board: for a working group like this, we most of all require comrades who are committed to working constructively to further the GLW-SA partnership. Applying an abstract schema is no way to achieve this.

Of course, there are dangers in the more democratic approach exemplified by the SSP. Comrades Walker, Chelliah and Bassi point out that many non-aligned members of SA “have regular family lives and work commitments that cannot simply be set aside on an ongoing, day to day basis”. They also point out that most non-affiliated members of SA have “long working hours” and “family pressure”. Quite so! So do most members of the SSP. So do most members of the DSP. There would be a problem here if the most fully committed activists in the DSP demanded a similar level of activism from the non-aligned SA members. No doubt, people would be scared off very quickly. But this has not been my experience of working on the ground with the most fully committed SA comrades, whether they be members of the DSP, the ISO, or non-affiliated. I have been drawn further (albeit modestly further) into political activity by the sorts of

factors that have drawn so many new members into the SSP: principally, witnessing and engaging in work with comrades I highly respect, whose non-sectarianism and commitment I greatly admire, and from whom I am (I hope) learning much. There is no other way. If there are problems about integrating our non-political lives with our political activity, these are problems faced by *all* members of SA, regardless of their affiliation. We are all human, we are all in this together.

So, we can have full internal democracy, with no bureaucratically mandated expulsions of good comrades from leadership bodies, with individual members of SA free to chose their affiliation or lack of it without fear of being kicked out of the SA jobs they are doing, with leadership emerging organically on the basis of experience, commitment and activism; or we can have a system governed by the sort of bureaucratic fiat ordained by “the third way”.

In Scotland, the effect of the SSP’s full internal democracy is clear for all to see. 3000 members at 12 pounds a month would translate into the Australian context as a party of 10,000 members each paying \$360 Australian dollars a year as membership fee. The effect of “the third way” would be equally dramatic: in all probability the result would be a castle in the air, a party of ghosts manned by a crew of skeletons.

Interview with Louise Walker

[Following is the full transcript of an interview conducted with Louise Walker by Green Left Weekly. An abridged version was published in GLW issue no. 629. Louise is a national convenor of Socialist Alliance who is not a member of any of the organisations affiliated to the Alliance. The interview was submitted to Alliance Voices by Louise Walker and Lalitha Chelliah.]

Q: What do you consider to be the major gains of the Socialist Alliance project so far?

A: Well, I think we have started to develop credibility within some of the key political campaigns of the past few years like anti-war, refugees, and, hopefully, union fightback against Howard’s anti-worker agenda. However, the significant mobilization (especially at leadership level) of people who are not members of any of the affiliate organisations is one of the greatest achievements of the Alliance. It has put the prospect of genuine socialist regroupment on the political map and shown the way to breaking out of the political isolation, persistent factionalism and sect-type marginalisation that has hamstrung the socialist movement from playing a real and significant role in the class struggle in past decades.

In particular, it was our mobilisation in the form of the original Non-Aligned Caucus (NAC) which delivered a circuit-breaker in a serious stand-off between the two largest competing affiliate organisations, the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP). It was NAC’s intervention that delivered two years of substantial National Conference decisions for the Alliance to move from being a loose electoral coalition toward becoming a multi-tendency socialist party (MTSP). These weren’t just any MTSP transitional arrangements, but NAC initiatives. Moreover, they were based upon a NAC-MTSP perspective, in which a broad and united socialist party could emerge that was more than simply the existing revolutionary affiliates but would embrace individual socialists from outside these affiliates and provide a platform for other socialist organizations not currently part of the Alliance to affiliate.

Through NAC we were able to arbitrate between affiliates in the Alliance’s decision-making bodies, and begin to shift the Alliance’s committees to a discussion about building the Socialist Alliance first for its own sake, and for the sake of renewal of the socialist movement from its current dreadful state. We created a way for affiliate organisations to stay, and to become internal tendencies, with full tendency rights. All of this has enabled the continuation of what has become the largest campaigning socialist organisation that has existed in many years in this country. It has become an organisation that has a public profile well beyond its size, and has proved to have some appeal to those looking for an alternative to Labor, a socialist alternative to the Greens, and for activists and supporters in the union and broader progressive movements.

Q: After two and a half years of moving in a partyish direction the Socialist Alliance seems to have reached a watershed in its development. Do you agree that that is the case?

A: Without question, and I think it would be foolhardy for even the most loyal Socialist Alliance member to avoid admitting and addressing this. But we need to be clear about what this watershed is. There have been quite some histrionics and mudslinging in the debate leading up to the current conference - accusations of DSP-bashing, red-baiting, rumour and innuendo of behind-the-scenes slur campaigns - that have obscured the core issues. This sort of stuff completely discredits the socialist unity initiatives that have been achieved to date and has become a smokescreen for addressing the real problems to moving forward.

Q: In your estimation what are the major problems confronting the SA at this time? Are they surmountable?

A: There are a number of major problems confronting SA at present, but I maintain that with a lot of hard work and frank discussion it is still possible, even at this stage, to overcome them.

Along with the decisions of the last two National Conferences that the Alliance move toward becoming an MTSP came a retreat from a genuine national leadership role of all the anti-MTSP affiliate organizations. Only the DSP fully supported the MTSP course. Not only did the DSP become an internal tendency - no longer building themselves publicly as a separate socialist presence - but they also considerably ramped up their internal and public activity in the name of Socialist Alliance. The second largest affiliate, the ISO, has retained a national leadership presence in the Alliance, but has slowly reduced its involvement to a handful of people in the cities in which it has members, and has otherwise quarantined itself from substantial involvement in the Alliance. Other affiliates have continued to attend some

meetings - mostly only National Executive meetings - but have systematically resisted caucusing with Socialist Alliance members and continued to build their own organisations publicly.

Non-affiliated NAC members tried to fill the political vacuum created by the effective withdrawal of the smaller anti-MTSP affiliates. However, NAC was never supported by any of the smaller affiliate organisations as an actually existing and objectively necessary vehicle for developing new non-affiliated leaders able to lead the Alliance in their own right, and fulfill the broad-based 'break from Labor' that shaped the foundation of the Alliance. Indeed, rather than identifying, seizing and fostering the promise for the future of the Alliance and the socialist movement more generally that NAC's emergence indicated, all of the anti-MTSP affiliate organisations have reacted defensively, if not aggressively, to it.

The critical juncture that has been reached now is that the DSP, post-integration, has also withdrawn its support for the continuation of NAC as the second, and only, base of support for an MTSP. I and other NAC leaders think this is a major political mistake. Without the other affiliates being for transforming the Alliance into a MTSP, and now without any core collective leadership role for non-affiliated members, we are by default (if not design!) heading toward a single-tendency, DSP-centred Alliance, rather than a genuine - in practice rather than on paper - multi-tendency party of socialist renewal.

Unless we can genuinely demonstrate that the Alliance is more than simply the DSP and a circle of supporters (however hidden behind a veil of "proportional representation", "publicly disappeared faction", "those who work lead", whatever) the transformation of the Alliance into a broad-based MTSP will fail. All this spin-doctoring that has been going on to the contrary will simply result in a self-collapsing, revolutionary-centred, and therefore narrow party-building exercise.

This is (perhaps inadvertently) recognized in the contributions of some former NAC members who have also failed to recognize NAC for what it has had to offer the Alliance, and have joined in the general attacks upon it.

No one disputes the hard work of the DSP - certainly not us who have been their strongest supporters for integration from the outset. It is not "DSP-bashing" to say that this one-sided commitment from only one affiliate is not desirable for developing a broad-based multi-tendency party. Likewise, withdrawing ongoing support for the only other collective pole of working support for the MTSP - NAC - is going to take us further away, not closer, to our supposedly mutual goal. New members to the Alliance, or to socialist politics may not be initially aware of the DSP-centred Alliance that will eventuate with this current course. But the rest of the existing socialist left knows, and in time so will new members.

We have been accused of continuing some sort of ongoing 'factional culture' for pointing this out. The same is said with regard to our proposal for institutionalizing a broad-based MTSP course by creating an inclusive NAC national leadership caucus, through which all non-affiliated SA leaders can have an opportunity to have an independent leadership voice, role and support network, and bring diverse perspectives to taking the Alliance forward.

What our critics fail to address, however, is that the largest faction (the DSP) is not exactly about to disband: indeed, quite the reverse. They are still making factional decisions about the course they want for the Alliance, their members are still bound to carry out whatever decisions they take, and this is not negotiable by the rest of the Alliance unless the DSP wish to negotiate. Given their relative weight in the Alliance at the moment this is a serious barrier for moving forward, a problem for the smaller affiliates and a problem for independent socialist leaders who may have a different vision for what the Alliance can and should be.

I'm not saying that the DSP has exercised its power irresponsibly. By and large it has been very responsible to date. But the current reaction to our disagreement has been factionally over-reactive, as if they think that all the pro-MTSP forces have to march in step with their new version for a revolutionary-centred Alliance rather than the broad-based NAC-MTSP that has shaped our Conference decisions to date.

As for our so-called 'anti-factional' non-affiliated critics, they have yet to inform us on how their negotiations to persuade the DSP to disband are going. For us though, we support the existence of political factions. That's what an MTSP is. Factions and factionalism are not the same thing. Trying to make political factions go away within a 'homogenised' class-struggle party is to deny the very complexity that the politics of class-struggle entails. Revolutionary centralization and homogenization of Socialist Alliance leadership in the current Australian conditions is a recipe for a roundabout way of political marginalisation and sect-building, not filling the large political space to the Left of Labor.

I'm convinced that this is absolutely the wrong kind of internal formation for non-affiliated members of the Alliance. I am certain that it will not usher in further genuine steps toward an MTSP, or allow and support the development of the fresh new socialist thinking that we need to come from the ranks of the non-affiliated membership.

Q: To many people on the left today, the Scottish Socialist Party is an inspiration. According to the SSP website "The SSP is a democratic party based on the principle of one person one vote. We do not have all-powerful leaders directing the party from above". Yet, you are on record as saying of the SSP that "it has never been an organisational form that ... I have thought would be successful in the Australian political context. [I] believe that if we continue to follow it, the Socialist Alliance will fail". Why do you think this?

A: I agree that the SSP is a tremendous example of socialist unity in a party formation, and its international power lies partly in giving us bits of ideas about new ways that we might be able to connect with working class and progressive struggles. My objections with trying to use the SSP model in Australia right now are not with its formal leadership and decision-making structures, nor its voting system - as is widely understood. A political party is made up of much more than its structures and decision-making procedures. For a political party to be successful it is essential

that its structures, processes, procedures and the attitudes of its members (that is, those practices that guide members and groups of members in managing their political relationships and differences with one another) promote an orientation to one another that is supportive, productive and mutually sustaining. In theory, at least, all Socialist Alliance members agree on this.

When drawing conclusions about what the SSP experience offers socialists as a way forward in Australia, it's vital to remember that it is a product of a different political context to that which continues to confront the socialist movement in Australia. In Scotland, the vast majority of organised socialists agreed at the outset to divest themselves of their distinctive public profiles. In Australia, the only organisation to become an internal tendency in the Socialist Alliance is the Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP), and that was not from the outset. Indeed, as I've already said, only a small number of the many Left and socialist groups and communities that exist in Australia have even agreed to join the Alliance. Those revolutionary organisations which are affiliated to the Alliance other than the DSP have not ceased to operate as public groups, and have often continued presenting in public under their own banners rather than under the single Socialist Alliance banner. For tactical reasons based on a joint reading of the Australian political context, the question of how we achieve socialism is something that the Alliance intentionally, and correctly, leaves open. One of the main arguments that these revolutionary groups make for continuing to present publicly is that they believe it is the only way to build their idea of an explicitly revolutionary party in Australia.

Now I completely disagree with their political judgment on this, and their stance and actual activity within the Alliance because of it regularly serves to discredit them among many non-affiliated members. Nevertheless it remains the case that they are committed to their approach, and while they do so it is important that we take it into account in our organizational form. With the increasing (de facto) dominance of the Alliance by the DSP, many of the smaller affiliates continue to cite a lack of confidence in the Alliance's ability to attract new affiliate organisations by allowing them their own political space and voice, and have become less engaged and more disenchanted with and publicly critical of the Alliance project over time. Like it or not, this is a crucial point which we fail to grasp at the Alliance's peril. And as I've already indicated, this concern is pervading wider layers of non-affiliated members and leaders too.

Q: You strongly support the decisions of the 2003 and 2004 Socialist Alliance National Conferences to transform the Socialist Alliance into a "Multi-Tendency Socialist Party" (MTSP). What is a MTSP? How do you envisage the role of organised tendencies within it?

A: Actually, I'll go a little further than that: not only do I strongly support the decisions of the 2003 and 2004 Conferences for the Socialist Alliance to make steps toward becoming an MTSP, I was one of the non-affiliated members who, through NAC, got up on stage at both National Conferences and put the case for it, as were Raul Bassi and Lalitha Chelliah, my fellow non-affiliated National Convenors.

I've already covered some of the answer to your question above.

In a nutshell, we cannot politically force socialist organizations to affiliate to the Alliance. Likewise, we cannot force existing affiliates to integrate as purely internal tendencies - to build themselves solely within the broad Alliance membership and through their movement work on behalf of the Alliance.

We need to guarantee that all affiliates have the capacity to remain affiliates - including by providing them with voice and vote within the Alliance. We have to maximize opportunities for them to want to contribute. I think that, by and large, that has been done. That anti-MTSP affiliates have shied away from continuing or deeper engagement has more to do with them than the NAC or the DSP. But it is a longer view that we need to take than the two years that we have been down this MTSP course. Forcing the issue, as if political work can't continue, or simply looking for scapegoats as to why we haven't done better as an Alliance (whether it be the elections, membership recruitment, movement interventions or the trial relationship with Green Left Weekly) simply becomes a recipe for further disengagement or disaffiliation. The same applies to non-affiliated people.

There is no point speculating abstractly about what role tendencies could and should play within the Alliance down the track. Formally, the Alliance structures are still open to all affiliates having a fully representative and participatory role. We need to work from where we actually are at the moment and with what has brought us to this point. Leaping beyond this to create some ideal unified socialist party, irrespective of the radically different conditions we are confronting in our own political context, will close the door to any multi-tendency party.

The same goes for the collective role that NAC played in creating the political conditions for a broad-based MTSP. The de-mobilisation of NAC that has occurred in this past year strips away the base capacity that has been built for the Alliance to reach out to more diverse political layers presently beyond all the affiliates. If you want political diversity you need to maximize efforts to reach out beyond existing tendencies and allow other internal tendencies to emerge, either organically or by additional affiliations. This won't happen if existing tendencies try to slay political differences into the past - as is happening to our position at the moment. And we won't get new affiliates or see new organic non-affiliated leaderships emerge from within the Alliance if we don't take a more flexible, creative and less narrowly focused tendency agenda to what the MTSP transformation should look like.

Left unity debate in SA: "Are you the Judean People's Front?" "Fuck off! We're the People's Front of Judea!"

By Rohan Gaiswinkler (Hobart branch)

The dialogue in the title of this contribution comes from the hilariously funny Monty Python film *The Life of Brian*. Obviously it's a dig at the fractured nature of the left (esp. in Britain where the Python team came from).

At the moment the ISO and the small affiliates to SA have opposed deepening left unity in SA. They say they want it to go back to being a united electoral front only. I think that if this camp wants to win the debate in a fair and honest way, then they have to provide convincing arguments for why all our politics are so different that we can only effectively work together in a serious way for two or three months, every three years or so - because that is the organisational logic of their position. Comrades from the 'no to further unity' camp have accused the DSP of trying to impose unity on SA, which is silly because you can't in a million years impose unity in such a context. Unity must be won. And despite the heated nature of this debate, unity can still be won.

Let's look at what's going on in Australia at the moment. The Coalition government is launching a new wave of attacks against working-class organisation with its IR agenda and the Labor Party leadership shows no signs that it intends to use its position to lead a real struggle against the attacks. The ACTU bigwigs are pushing a bullshit "use our brains - not our brawn" position. Do we not all agree that this is the situation?! If we do all agree then surely we can work together on this fight. And if we can work together on this - and given that most of our politics is actually very similar - then why can't we work together as a fighting team - as a... I hesitate to use this word but here it is appropriate - as a vanguard. Yes, various organisations have different characterisations of the ALP. But our tactical disagreements with regard to the ALP are smaller still. Are these minor differences really an insurmountable obstacle to a united struggle against Howard's attacks?

Who in the 'no to further unity camp' disagrees with the idea that revolutionaries should seek to be both leaders, and servants, of the working class? By servants I mean that we should seek to serve the interests of the working class, to advance its position, to push the class struggle forward. We can do this best by providing the best leadership. I think that SA will be far more capable of providing such leadership as a MTSP (Multi-Tendency Socialist Party) compared to what we can do as a mere electoral front. We have to ask ourselves: Are we putting the working class, or our own interests first? There is enough evidence out there that the working class desires unity.

Others have accused the DSP of wishing to impose a MTSP model on SA. But the idea of a MTSP is not a model and it is a misuse of the English language to say that it is. A model is a design which specifies both form and content. For example, a model airplane contains a specific structure and materials not just the 'form' of an airplane. The DSP has been promoting the idea of becoming a MTSP. A MTSP is the form, with the content as yet undecided. We do not have a model, because the right model can only be developed in practice, with the specifics derived from experience, discussion and agreement.

In promoting unity, the DSP has had two key ideas. Firstly the idea that if we can just work together in struggle, then confidence and trust in each other can be built over time. This is the best sort of environment for useful and comradely discussion of our differences and the best sort of environment for overcoming our political differences. The second idea is that a MTSP is the best form in which to do all this.

Whether we like it or not, the political differences among the revolutionary affiliates in SA look like a storm in a tea cup when viewed from the point of view of those still orbiting within mainstream politics.

Remember those words: "Are you the Judean People's Front?"

"Fuck off! We're the People's Front of Judea!"

How the West was (Almost) Lost

By Mark Lockett (Perth branch and WA State Executive member)

The May 15th WA State Meeting.

The Socialist Alliance is in a strange situation at the moment where success and failure seem to be occurring at the same time. On the one hand we have grown by about 10% each of the previous two years, set up several new branches, ran the biggest socialist federal election campaign for decades, ran the biggest WA state socialist election campaign for decades, have produced three issues of a well regarded magazine and are now at the cutting edge of the campaign to defeat the draconian IR law changes. On the other hand the alliance is in the middle of a crisis of perspective. The Perth and Fremantle branches are stagnant, turnout at meetings has declined mainly because of the declining attendance of non-aligned members.

On the 2nd May the WA State Executive met, it's most important item of business was recommendations for the new state executive. The executive proposed three office bearer positions - a convenor, treasurer and trade union co-ordinator, this structure was supported by all 6 members at the meeting (4 DSP and 2 non-aligned including myself). The executive then voted to recommend people for the positions (to my knowledge the first time the alliance has done this) the exec recommended three DSP members for the three office bearer positions. Essentially three incumbents, some who had been in office in an acting capacity). I abstained on supporting this ticket on the basis that I was unwilling to support an all DSP office bearer ticket. The other five members (4 DSP, 1 non-aligned voted for it). I also bought up that I would like to see the ISO back on the state exec, the one other non-aligned member agreed, three of the DSP members said the ISO was entitled to a position on the state exec as an affiliate (the fourth remained silent), or reading between the lines that the ISO was entitled to an affiliate representative on the state executive but we would rather they didn't take it up.

A week later I had a conversation with a leading member of the ISO. I told him I would like the ISO to return to the State Executive and he agreed!

Come the State wide Meeting to elect a new state executive a major battle broke out. On the issue of the structure the ISO proposed two co-convenors, a state treasurer and a trade union co-ordinator with the implication that they

would support the State exec's recommended candidates and one of their own members as the additional co-convenor. The vote on this amendment for 9 against 13, or by faction for 3 - ISO 6 – Non-aligned against 13 - DSP. The DSP could not find a single other member to support their position. Next came the convenor election the results were DSP candidate – 14 votes, ISO candidate - 7 votes. Meaning that the ISO candidate got the votes of 4 of the 6 non-aligned members (the total number of votes has changed because some DSPers left the meeting between the votes), one of the non-aligned members who voted for the DSP convenor candidate was myself who told the meeting I would support the ISO candidate for treasurer. By this point a split was brewing, thankfully the DSP candidate for treasurer moved to amend the ticket to create two co-treasurer positions – the meeting then unanimously filled the remaining positions.

This all has a prequel, at the May 2nd state executive I asked the treasurer (who was also the Fremantle rep at that point) about the state of the alliance in Fremantle, his reply was that some members of the alliance in Fremantle had been meeting informally for coffee to discuss things. The names he gave were all members of the DSP. Together they would have been only one person shy of a quorum for the Fremantle branch, the May 15th state wide meeting was attended by two Fremantle based ISO members and one Fremantle based non-aligned. Why then can we not have a democratically called Fremantle branch meeting rather than a DSP invitation only 'chat over coffee' that performs the same purpose? (The chats over coffee did lead to the organisation of a real public meeting BTW).

Why did I write this?

Because Peter Boyle and other members of the DSP (and their ever loyal side kick Dave Riley) allege that the failure of the proposal for the alliance to become a multi-tendency socialist party can be blamed upon the smaller affiliates withdrawing from leadership in the alliance at a local level. Of course, it's rubbish. The smaller affiliates (including the ISO) only have a presence in about half the branches, and in some of them its only one or two. As far as WA is concerned the ISO has made a return to the state executive, everybody voted for them to come back even if one affiliate did so while gritting it's teeth.

Pre-conference discussion contribution

By Tony Dewberry (Wills branch and National Executive member)

At the very last minute in pre-conference discussion the National Executive of the Socialist Alliance called for a discussion of our overall perspectives. So this will be the third conference in a row to discuss the two counterposed perspectives of MTSP or electoral united front.

As a member of the outgoing National Executive I will have delegate status at this conference. This is a privilege and I feel obliged to explain my stand on perspectives and nail my colours to the mast on a few questions.

I should point out that I am a late convert to the MTSP position. I did not sign the Non-Aligned Caucus call for an MTSP before the last conference. I held back from endorsing it because of concern it would alienate the affiliates, but once the conference adopted the MTSP goal I swung my support behind it. I felt, and still feel, that if we did not try to make the MTSP objective work we would be saying that the national conferences of the Socialist Alliance do not matter, that they are not where our political course is set. So, as an unaligned NE member, I have voted for every initiative that I thought took us towards our goal of an MTSP. That is I've supported attempts to give the SA a more party-like structure, such as the administrative changes recently passed by the NE and ratified at various state conferences.

From this point of view I have to admit that I made a mistake in my NE vote on the *Green Left Weekly* report. The report authors wanted to make the GLW/SA board more of a working body, made up of those that supported the GLW/SA trial. This would have allowed those committed to the success of the trial to get on with the job and would have, more importantly, transferred discussion of any political problems to the more appropriate level of the National Executive, a body on which all the political tendencies are represented.

I hope the MTSP goal survives our debate on perspectives, and that the conference goes on to create a more party-like structure. An MTSP has to be a campaigning party, one that does all it can to build struggles against the bosses' offensive. I am in favour of SA members working together as SA members in the unions and social movements. I agree with the sorts of ideas put forward in Pip Hinman's contribution on unity of SA forces in the anti-war movement. I would like to see a similar approach in the refugee rights movement. I'm not talking here about tightly disciplined caucuses that impose a pre-ordained line on social movements. I just think SA members should be co-ordinating their work, promoting SA policy, and raising the profile of the SA in all struggles.

These are the sorts of initiatives I will be supporting at the conference.

Reading the signposts at the crossroads

By Greg Adler (Marrickville branch and member of the National Executive)

The working class faces a huge fight on the most fundamental issues of the defence of basic trade union right, wages, conditions and jobs in the face of the triumphalist moves of the Howard Government to take over industrial relations and roll back workers gains in all these areas.

In taking up this fight we in the Socialist Alliance face a great test. It is in that sense that we are at a crossroads. By our decisions at the coming National Conference we will be able to tell if the SA is in fact able to meet the most preliminary demands of that test.

There may well be a number of positions or perspectives presented at the Conference but the view that I present is that these boil down to two basic opposing views on how we go on in SA.

On the one hand we have the view put forward by the Democratic Socialist Perspective with the support of its close associates in the SA such as Dave Riley and Alex Miller. Broadly this can be summed up as perpetuating the fantastic over-estimation of the actual existing role and influence of the SA in the development of the class struggle in its industrial and political manifestations and accompanying this with a drive to set up a new structure in the SA which, under a fig leaf of pluralism, will perpetuate DSP dominance in the SA-the high point of what some non-affiliated comrades have referred to as re-badging.

To go into the full detail of this would result in a very large document of the type that may be more suitable to be written when we have to explain before the working class the failure of the SA if the path of disaster being laid out by the DSP is followed. However I will go to a couple of representative issues.

We have had a new round of declarative triumphalism in relation to the development of the campaign against the introduction of Howard's brutal new industrial relations regime. In our last NE meeting before the conference a number of DSP members spoke about the responsibility of the SA and its importance in the building of the campaign. Now whilst we can welcome the important role of a few SA members with some influence in sections of the union movement such as Chris Cain in the MUA in WA the over-estimation of the SA's role exemplified in the contribution of Peter Boyle in this issue of AV "New challenges for Socialist Alliance" -"We've built something quite amazing," he proclaims is merely ludicrous.

This campaign requires a very determined fight to build the greatest possible unity in the workers' struggle and to advance as strongly as possible a combined industrial, community and legal campaign to defeat the Howard Government's plans and to strengthen as much as we can the class response rather than proclaiming our leadership of it.

To turn, relatively briefly to another issue. We are continually assured by the DSP that they are for pluralism and unity but we see sectarianism expressed not only in the attitude to the broad labour movement but in an extremely sharp way to those within the SA who do not toe the DSP line. An example of this has been the vituperative response from DSP members and their supporters to the non-affiliated National Convenor comrades who have raised somewhat moderate differences with the DSP position.

But in recent days there has been an almost hysterical campaign carried on mainly on the Green Left Weekly discussion site aimed at the publication of an article in the Socialist Worker the paper of the International Socialist Organisation - the only affiliate of the SA other than the DSP to have any numerical significance or independent political apparatus. Various DSP members and their avid supporters have sought to outdo each other in condemning the article, its author and the ISO. At times this has descended to a disturbing level. To be clear about my position the article's style and tone is, at best off-putting in my view. That however has not by and large been the focus of the torrent of comments. Even though the article was broadly supportive of Chavez it put forward reservations about the practice of the Bolivarian circles and the MVR the political organisation which supports Chavez. The writer also notes the lack of any perceived left political opposition to Chavez and his movement.

For this he has been mocked and lacerated in this discussion site particularly by the DSP's Chavez cheerleader in chief Stuart Munckton. But interestingly Stuart himself has recently posted an article onto the site in which serious questions are raised about the role of elements within the MVR who to one degree or another oppose in practice the progressive developments within Venezuela.

Further "Marcel&Maria", DSP members of SA who are openly and proudly strong supporters of Chavez posted to the site an article from the May 30 Guardian by Richard Gott with this heading "Chavez leads the way: In using oil wealth to help the poor, Venezuela's leader is an example to Latin America"

As might be gathered from the title this is a highly pro-Chavez piece and it outlines many of the strong progressive gains made under his leadership in the country. In that context the following passage is of particular interest: "So, what does this Bolivarian revolution consist of? He is friendly with Castro-indeed, they are close allies- yet he is no out-of-fashion state socialist. Capitalism is alive and well in Venezuela-and secure. There have been no illegal land seizures, no nationalisations of private companies. Chavez seeks to curb the excesses of what he terms "savage neo-liberalism", and he wants the state to play an intelligent and enabling role in the economy, but he has no desire to crush small businesses, as has happened in Cuba. International oil companies have fallen over themselves to provide fresh investment, even after the government increased the royalties that they have to pay. Venezuela remains a golden goose that cannot be ignored."

So there you have it -that seems to describe a situation where a socialist might take a position of strong support for the progressive developments under Chavez and strong support of any gains for workers and peasants against attack by local capitalism or imperialism. But such a socialist on the ground may see the need for an independent position opposed to keeping capitalism alive and well and secure in Venezuela.

Now the strategy and tactics of that are certainly a matter for discussion but the outburst against this article, which in essence raises questions which are similarly raised in the postings by DSP members has much more to do with sectarian pot shooting at a group whose crime is to be not the DSP.

This is the political path which has given rise to the structural proposals put forward by Lisa MacDonald and Dave Riley in this issue of AV. Proposals which, in essence, formalise the domination of the SA organisationally by the DSP if they are adopted by the conference. The 40% limit on an affiliates members in the NE will obviously be gained by the DSP and ensure an effective majority for any position it favours in the SA.

The alternative to this is contained in the modest proposals that I put forward in AV recently and in actually attempting to build an SA as a pluralist gathering of Socialist voices attempting to build real support in working class and community struggles rather than declaring our central importance.

Amendments to our proposal for SA's national leadership structure

Moved by Dave Riley (National Executive member) and Lisa Macdonald (National Co-convenor)

Following the discussion at a National Conveners' meeting and with other National Executive members since we presented our proposal for a new national leadership structure (*Alliance Voices*, Vol 5 No 5), we are making two amendments to the original proposal. These are:

Amendment 1:

The inclusion of a 40% limit on the election by conference of members of any one affiliate, tendency or organised political current to the National Executive.

Rationale:

This 40% limit strengthens the pluralism embodied in our original proposal that the National Executive be elected by conference using the Single Transferable Vote (proportional representation) method.

While we are strengthening the inclusivity of different views on the National Executive with this amendment, we are not proposing that the 40% limit also apply to representatives elected by the states/territories because the inclusion of minority opinions and perspectives must be balanced by democracy and real leadership in practice if the National Executive is to be the more effective, working leadership body that SA now requires. The election of state/territory representatives on the National Executive should be a matter for those state/territory memberships to decide.

Amendment 2:

The replacement of National Conveners with a national treasurer, a national coordinator and sub-committees as needed, to be elected by the National Executive.

Rationale:

This amendment will help the National Executive to be a real political leadership for the Alliance, not a rubber stamping body as has been far too much the case over the last year. In practice, the existence of "national conveners" (which was originally intended as a temporary arrangement) has meant that most of the political discussions and decision-making has actually been made, not by the National Executive, but by a much smaller body (the national conveners), which has operated as a pseudo-National Executive.

All of the work currently done by the national conveners can be done just as effectively, and more democratically/inclusively, by a National Executive that can have more frequent and thorough political discussions about the work of the Alliance; that establishes sub-committees as needed to implement its decisions in specific areas (as already exists with the national Trade Union Committee; Membership, Finances and Branch Building Committee; etc), and that elects a couple of office bearers who are directly accountable to the National Executive - a national treasurer to manage SA's bookkeeping and a national coordinator to do national administrative tasks and facilitate communication between the membership and the National Executive.

Ammended resolutions

With these amendments, our proposal for a new national leadership structure would require the following changes to the Constitution:

Amend 6.3 to read:

6.3. National Conference shall elect a National Executive

Replace 6.5 with:

6.5. The National Executive shall elect a National Treasurer, a National Coordinator, and Sub-committees as required to implement the decisions of the National Executive in between meetings.

Replace 6.6 with:

6.6. The National Executive shall be composed according to the following formula:

?? 15 persons to be elected by the same proportional representation system used in the election of conference delegates from the branches to guarantee minority representation (single transferable vote), with no more than 40% to be elected from any one affiliate, tendency or organised political current.

?? In addition, any state or territory executive/committee which does not have a state member in the NE so elected shall have the right to send a delegate with voice and vote to all NE meetings, that delegate to be selected by the relevant state executive or state committee.

Amend 6.8 to read:

6.8. If one quarter of the paid-up membership or a majority of state executives/state committees request it by petition to the National Executive, a Special Conference of the Alliance shall be called in addition to National Conferences.

If anyone would like to discuss any aspect of the proposal with us, please do not hesitate to contact Dave at dhell2@optusnet.com.au or Lisa at lisam@dsp.org.au or 0413 031 108.

Appendix: Relevant sections of the current Constitution

6.3. National Conference shall elect a National Executive, and any National Officeholders.

6.4. National working groups and other bodies may be formed by National Conference or the National Executive.

6.5. The National Officeholders shall be five National Conveners, at least two of whom shall not belong to an affiliate organisation. The National Conveners, to be elected out of the incoming National Executive, shall be elected by the slate method. Proposed slates for the National Conveners can only be nominated after the election of the incoming National Executive.

6.6. The National Executive shall be composed according to the following formula:

From affiliated organisations, one representative for every 50 Socialist Alliance members or part thereof, with declared Socialist Alliance tendency figures subject to scrutiny by National Conference on request;

Unaffiliated state and territory representatives: The total number of unaffiliated State and Territory representatives shall match the total number of affiliate representatives, plus one to create an odd-numbered National Executive with an unaffiliated majority;

Each State or Territory shall have at least one unaffiliated State or Territory representative, with the remainder of the total number distributed proportionally among States and Territories in accordance with the total State and Territory membership at the time of the Third national Conference.

If an unaffiliated member cannot be found to represent a particular state or territory a casual vacancy shall exist and shall be filled through election at a state- or territory-wide meeting or the relevant state/territory executive.

Between conferences, if necessary, proxies to the National Executive may be (i) appointed by the affiliated group, in the case of a representative of An affiliated group, or (ii) in the case of a representative of a state or territory be elected by a state- or territory-wide meeting or the relevant state/territory executive. State and Territory representatives can proxy to any member of that State or Territory.

State delegations shall submit their list of provisional State or Territory National Executive representatives to National Conference, including, if necessary, by meeting at National Conference and electing by proportional representation, subject to ratification at their next State or Territory conference.

Unaligned State or Territory representatives shall be responsible to their respective State or Territory Conference, and will be subject to full right of recall.

Any organisations affiliating to the Socialist Alliance after the Third National Conference shall, at the invitation of the National Executive, be accorded representation on the National Executive according to the formula for existing affiliates as above.

If further organisations affiliate to the Socialist Alliance, the extra State or Territory representatives needed to maintain an unaligned majority on the National Executive shall be distributed to States and/or Territories according to membership at the time of the Third National Conference, and elected by the succeeding appropriate State and/or Territory conferences.

National Conference shall ratify the list of National Executive candidates submitted by affiliates and State and Territory delegations prior to the election of the National Conveners.

6.8. If one quarter of the paid-up membership requests it by petition to the National Executive, a Special Conference of the Alliance shall be called in addition to National Conferences.

Some resolutions for the national conference

Moved by Bernie Rosen (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

1. Campaign for a 50% reduction of interest rates on bank cards.
2. Campaign for abolition of charges for over the counter banking.
3. Campaign for the nationalisation of banking and insurance by amendments to the Commonwealth Constitution that would enable a progressive government to legislate for this purpose.
4. Action to be taken to have Green Left Weekly sold at newsagencies.
5. Proposals for the construction of dams for water conservation.
6. Prepare an appropriate policy for the rural sector of the economy that would appeal to the struggling farmer.
7. Increase aged and disability pensions to 75% of the basic wage.
8. Campaign for free dental care for all pensioners to be financed by the Federal Government.
9. Campaign for the provision of accommodation for the homeless.
10. The provision of free lunches for school children from poor families.
11. Full support for the campaign to secure the exoneration and release of Schapelle Corby.

Proposed Constitutional amendments

Moved by Peter Murray (Wills branch) for the Freedom Socialist Party

In the Section "Definitions" insert new clause 2.3

2.3 *Affiliate group.* An affiliate is a socialist party, migrant organisation, trade union or similar working class organisation that has joined the Alliance as a discrete entity.

In the Section "Membership" insert new clause 5.4

5.4. In order to foster and maintain the political plurality of the Alliance, all affiliate organisations, including any internal political tendencies shall be accorded representation on the national Executive and the respective State Executives, provided that:

- (i) no affiliate group or internal tendency shall be entitled to representatives in excess of 40% of the total membership of the National or State Executive; and
- (ii) an affiliate group or internal tendency may decline to be represented on the National Executive or a State Executive either upon joining the Alliance or at a National or State conference, but shall be accorded representation at a subsequent National or State conference upon application to the conference; and
- (iii) should an affiliate group or internal tendency decline representation or fail to nominate a representative at a National or State Conference, any positions accorded to them on the National or State Executive shall be subtracted from the total membership of the respective Executive until such time as an affiliate organisation applies to fill them; and
- (iv) nothing in this clause shall be understood as according an affiliate group or internal tendency positions on the State Executive of a State where that affiliate has no members who are members of the Alliance or in the case of an internal tendency has no members in the state.

Reword and renumber existing clause 5.4 as follows:

5.5. Membership of the Alliance assumes a commitment to a non-sectarian and co-operative way of working, looking to build unity, positively supporting and encouraging the notion of alliances and ensuring that any critical debates are conducted in a positive manner and without personal attacks.

Renumber existing 5.5 to 5.6.

Effects of the proposed changes

New clause 2.3. While there are numerous references to “affiliates” and “affiliate groups” in the constitution, there is no definition. This provides a definition.

New clause 5.4. This amendment, as it states, is intended to ensure the political plurality of the Alliance and to defend the principle of minority representation on peak leadership bodies. It guarantees that all political currents in the Alliance are able to take part in the political decision-making that guides Alliance work and policy development, at both National and State level.

Sub-clause (i) limits membership on the executive by any one political tendency or affiliate to 40%. This prevents domination by any one such tendency but allows a clear majority to emerge if a large tendency or affiliate stands in opposition to a proposal. It therefore limits the possibility of an Executive being deadlocked without too harshly restricting the representation of a large tendency or affiliate.

Sub-clause (ii) removes the burden of participation from affiliates who are unable to participate on a regular basis or who wish to contribute to the Alliance in other ways. At the same time it makes clear that an affiliate can claim the right of representation on application to the next National or State Conference after the right was waived.

Sub-clause (iii) provides that the positions of affiliates who decline representation do not exist for the life of the next Executive. This means that they cannot count towards the 40% calculation.

Sub-clause (iv) makes it clear that if an affiliate has members in a state who are not members of the Alliance in that state, then there is no right to representation on that State Executive. It also means that an affiliate active in South Australia only (for example) has no right to representation on any other State Executive. There is a similar effect on internal tendencies of the Alliance

Modified clause 5.5. and renumbered 5.6. The clause 5.5 refers to the clause immediately above, which is now the new 5.4. The reference now makes no sense and has been removed. Clause 5.6 is simply renumbered from the existing clause 5.5.

Discussion

It seems to us that there has been an increasing odour of winner-take-all since the adoption of the Multi-Tendency Socialist Party perspectives two years ago. That we are opposed to this view of the Alliance is no secret. However, that does not mean that we do not continue to support the principle of a Socialist Alliance in Australia. Nor does it mean that we do not continue to support agreed Alliance policy. The Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) has not absented itself from leadership of the Alliance, as is asserted both by the leadership of the Democratic Socialist Perspective (DSP) and leading “non-aligned” comrades. In fact we are proud to have taken leads in the area of policy development far in excess of our numerical weight in SA.

There is a flawed view amongst some in the Alliance that those who “do the work” should lead it. Flawed, in our view, because it assumes that leadership is somehow a reward for effort rather than as a political responsibility. It also seems to value the high visibility role of national co-ordination, vital though that is, above the work by rank and file members and leaders of the Alliance at branch level.

We argue that this view arises from a particular political perspective that sees the working class as being led by a group of visionary activists who would have more success if only the workers would see that they have the correct ideas and the correct method of organising. But as any Marxist knows, the leadership of any struggle arises out of the struggle. Leninist organisations, such as FSP and the DSP, correctly seek to recruit from the movements the most advanced workers, those who have already reached the conclusion that complete social change is necessary if we are to build a better world. But Leninist organisations do not create mass upheavals, which arise from conjunctions of powerful social forces. Leninist organisations make a difference by providing organisation and political leadership in times of mass uprising.

FSP considers that it is those most oppressed by this barbaric capitalist system will provide the impetus for the next wave of revolutionary struggle, and concludes that work at *both* the national and the local level is the way to encourage emerging leaders. This means taking a historic view – many years where hard work is rewarded by more hard work. We continue to build our own organisation precisely because the Socialist Alliance cannot and should not be a Leninist party. The other view, which arises from a particular version of Leninism where the revolutionary is more the “heroic leader”, results, in our opinion, in the alienation of the revolutionary from the “masses”. It also leads to impatience and intolerance of those who “fail to see” that the leader is, by definition, correct.

This last proposition leads us back to the current state of the Socialist Alliance. Admitting the many organisational frustrations facing the national leaders of the Alliance, we state that these are no reason to force a particular model of organisation upon those who disagree. Yet this is what is occurring. The Alliance is a new organisation. It will, in time, develop an internal life that encourages more members to participate in the organisational work, even to begin to financially contribute. But that cannot be at the expense of political plurality.

The FSP remains committed to the Alliance as a united front, in terms of campaigning both in the social movements and in elections. We are also keen to see the Alliance expand, but why would any new organisation join the Alliance without expecting, and being accorded, a political voice at leadership level? The Alliance will not attract new affiliates if they are denied representation on its leadership bodies.

Proposals to centralise Alliance administration, to reduce the size and political plurality of bodies such as the National Executive, and to deprive the local branches of funding are inward looking. They will result in a smaller, passive membership. The kindest thing to say about the proposed changes to the Alliance’s structure is that they substitute organisational quick fixes for political debate and analysis.

More sharply, they smack of the largest affiliate attempting to run over the top of all those who disagree with it. Because, as Comrades Walker, Chelliah and Bassi have written, the DSP will struggle to have less than 50% of the delegates to Conference, it will also struggle not to dominate a reduced National Executive. This means that the political views and organisational methods of the DSP will increasingly be blurred into, and substitute for, those of the Alliance as a discrete entity. This does not have to be deliberate. Nevertheless, without arrangements that enforce scrutiny by other political tendencies and non-aligned members of the Alliance, it will inevitably happen.

In the past few weeks we have seen evidence of the DSP’s willingness to get its own way at all costs, not least of which was the addition of another DSP vote on the National Executive in contravention of the spirit the Alliance Constitution, if not the letter. We have also seen, in the Victorian and New South Wales divisions, proposals on funding and administration rammed through without any discussion in the local branches. In Victoria, the proposals were not even circulated prior to the conference. Whether one supports or opposes the new system is not the question here. The question is that the membership’s right to scrutinise policy was ignored. In Victoria, clearly there had been discussions about the proposals in the DSP, but the rest of the membership was kept in the dark. The DSP ignored the State constitution, used its numbers and, because of the manner in which the State Executive is elected, now has effective control of the finances in Victoria.

What this speaks to is the urgent need to enshrine minority rights in the constitution, before all the affiliates (except the DSP) decide to leave, before the branches atrophy and before the non-aligned leaders of the Alliance decide it’s all too hard and also drift away.

That is the purpose and intention of this amendment, and I urge all supporters of a pluralist Socialist Alliance to support it.

The Socialist Alliance-Green Left Weekly Editorial Board’s revised report and resolutions for National Conference

June 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 visitors 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. According to the National Convenors, roughly 50% of applications to join SA that arrive in the mail come via GLW clip-offs.

The present report should be read against the background of a number of decisions by the Socialist Alliance National Convenors, 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 progress towards 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. Progress towards objective (b) has also been made. 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 Morphett) 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
- ?? Queers Need Fighting Unions: Rachel Evans
- ?? Craig Johnston, welcome back to the struggle: Sue Bolton
- ?? Something to Fight For: Dave Riley (pending)

The Board notes that of these 20 columns, only 8 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 forwards 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 the board 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, to "negotiating the integration of GLW and SA editorial committees and the transformation of GLW into the national weekly newspaper of SA". **This does not mean simply collapsing the work of the two boards into a single board.** Although progress has been made in the past year, the nature of the board has been a frustrating factor in developing the GLW-SA partnership. The board as currently organised is a senate-like board of review rather than a working board, and this has meant that the board has spent valuable time and energy 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. With this in mind, the board proposes the following resolutions:

Revised resolutions for conference

1. Conference recommends that the board continue its non-sectarian work of encouraging a pluralist and diverse range of voices and perspectives from within SA to publish in Green Left Weekly.

2. Conference recommends that the protocols agreed on in February 2004 be adopted with the effect of putting the GLW-SA partnership on an ongoing footing. Conference notes that this is not a resolution recommending that GLW, as it currently is, be adopted as "the SA paper". Conference calls for constructive debate from all quarters on how, with GLW as a starting point, the development of an SA newspaper can proceed. Conference encourages affiliates of the Alliance with their own publications to consider ways of pooling their resources with those of GLW to create an even more effective publication for the left and socialist movement in Australia.

3. Conference recommends that the current editorial liaison board be replaced by a smaller board consisting of six members, elected at the SA national conference. **In a spirit of non-sectarianism, conference emphasises that there are no political restrictions or requirements on the composition of the board other than SA membership: any SA member is eligible to serve on the board, regardless of their political orientation, affiliation or lack of it, so long as they undertake to work pro-actively, constructively and in a non-sectarian manner in furthering the GLW-SA partnership.** However, 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. Those debates can be continued, if necessary, in the appropriate forums outside the board. 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 encouraging a diverse range of SA input into GLW and developing the GLW-SA partnership. The board will report as required to the NE on progress made towards this end.

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

5. Conference recommends 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.

6. Conference recommends that SA branches, state committees, National Coordinating Committees and caucuses elect/appoint a comrade to liaise with the incoming GLW-SA board to advance input into and distribution of GLW.

Alex Miller Dave Riley

Two resolutions for national conference

Moved by the Gold Coast branch

1. That the focus of Seeing Red be shifted to include more agitational content.
2. That Socialist Alliance establish a National Working Group for casual workers' issues, and that one of its tasks be to formulate a national strategy in relation to casual workers' issues.

Motions and amendments to be moved by ISO members at SA conference 2005

Lessons from the Respect victory

Conference welcomes the significant breakthrough made by the Respect party in England and Wales in the recent British general election, in particular the election of George Galloway.

Conference believes that there are some lessons for the Socialist Alliance from the experience of Respect, including:

?? The need to build the anti-war movement, which formed the basis for the founding of Respect.

?? The need to take electoral work seriously, and to concentrate limited resources in key local seats to maximise impact.

?? The importance of adopting a non-sectarian, united front approach to the Muslim community, disaffected Labor supporters and leftwing union activists.

?? The role of local campaigning, linking major issues like war to local issues over cutbacks to services, etc.

?? The need to put down roots in the community.

Socialist Alliance publications

Conference believes that the trial relationship between the Socialist Alliance and *Green Left Weekly* has failed. Furthermore, it has distorted the priorities of the Alliance and contributed to a tense and uncomradely atmosphere in leading bodies.

Conference welcomes the support of *Green Left Weekly*, and other affiliate publications, and believes that such support would be forthcoming despite the trial.

Conference believes that the publications which serve the Alliance best are those that grow organically out of our work and which can be produced and funded from the resources the Alliance has at this stage of its development. Such publications include broadsheets, union and women's charters, *Seeing Red* and general mass distribution leaflets.

Accordingly, conference agrees to terminate the SA-GLW trial and instructs the incoming national executive to arrange for the publication of at least four broadsheets between now and conference 2006.

Amendment to the report on Building Socialist Alliance

Amend 6 (iv) to read:

State/territory committees to retain 50 per cent of all membership fees (branches to keep donations accompanying membership dues) to cover the costs of servicing the membership as above, and any other state/territory-wide campaign costs agreed to by the state/territory committee (eg: upper house election campaigns, national leaflets etc that will be used by all local branches.) The remaining 50 per cent shall be remitted once a quarter to branches in proportion to their financial membership.

Amend 7 to read:

That the previously adopted voluntary national pledge system be regularised through a process of negotiation between each branch and the MFBB committee to establish, by July 1, a mutually agreed, voluntary national pledge amount per week, to be noted by the NE. The target voluntary pledge amount shall remain \$1 per week per branch member at the time of election of delegates to national conference, and the pledge amount can be re-negotiated at the request of the branch at any time.

Amend 9 to read:

That Socialist Alliance use the branches' pledges to help fund, through payment of pro rata award wages, a part-time national organiser responsible and accountable to the National Executive who will help coordinate and implement the day-to-day national organisation of SA's work, including the communication between members and leadership bodies and ensuring that SA complies with Electoral Commission requirements for party registration.

Delete clause 11.

Amendment to the report on Australian Politics

Delete contents of clause 8) and insert:

The Socialist Alliance exists to create a viable alternative to the Labor Party, whose trajectory continues to be to the right. Such an alternative cannot be built through denunciation; it takes a patient process of both working with ALP members and supporters and publicly posing alternative politics and strategies.

Many ALP members and supporters will agree with our criticisms of Beazley's leadership and of the rightward drift of the party. They will do so all the more readily if they experience Socialist Alliance members as allies in the joint struggle against the Liberals, oppression, racism, sexism and war.

Amendments to the motion on leadership structures moved by Dave Riley and Lisa Macdonald

In the paragraph on limits to affiliate representation:

Delete 40% and insert "one third".

In the paragraph on "top-up" NE members from states and territories not otherwise represented, delete "and vote" from the phrase "voice and vote".

Suggested additions to SA's Gender Agenda

By Elena Garcia (Qld)

A suggestion for the next printing of Gender Agenda.

I agree wholeheartedly with SA's Gender Agenda. I would make two small additions.

1. Under "the reality today", this dot point should read:

"In most states abortion is still illegal and is becoming much more difficult for poor, rural and/or young women to obtain. IVF technologies too are only available to the rich as a real option. IVF is hugely expensive and has a low success rate, which makes it almost impossible for poorer women to use it successfully. Meanwhile, lesbian couples still cannot adopt children or access IVF in most states."

2. Under "we demand action...For women's control of their own bodies", this dot point should read:

"No discrimination based on age, sexual preference, marital status or wealth for access to reproductive technologies. Reproduction is a woman's right to choose, and IVF should be available safely, free of charge and on demand through the public health system. Just like abortion, free IVF on demand should be a woman's right to choose.

Women in prison to be able to use contraception and have access to pregnancy or abortion care if necessary."

Resolution for conference: Towards a progressive pedagogy

By Barry Healy (East/Hills branch, Perth)

On May 22 our branch held a workshop to look at education policy. We have been intending to do this since last year when an aspect of Socialist Alliance's education policy was brought home to us in the federal election, namely the ending of state funding to private schools.

In our branch there are quite a few parents. Only one of them has a child in a public school (most are in a Montessori community school, the others in Catholic, Christian, community and home schools). Two young comrades attend a public high school and are disillusioned with the system.

There are three teachers in our branch and one graduating teacher. They have had negative experiences with the state education system.

Since its inception our branch has drawn support from among the parents and teachers at the local Montessori school. When we distributed our election manifesto no one objected to a single point except our line on education funding, which our supporters felt was antagonistic towards them.

It didn't cost us support but it was certainly brought to our notice. So, the issue has been thrashed about in our conversations since and I'm sure that it is being thought about by many SA comrades who have children in alternative schools.

What we want for our children is not private education; we support public funding of education. But we want a more progressive pedagogy.

In our workshop we looked at the current explosion of progressive pedagogy in Venezuela and then discussed the issues most on our minds.

We brainstormed onto butchers paper around three basic questions:

- ?? what do we hate about the way education currently works;
- ?? what are some underlying assumptions that control the current system; and,
- ?? what do we want to see?

Under 'what do we hate?' we said: individual competition; the erosion of children's self-confidence; the elitist element in funding arrangements; the fact that working-class history is not taught; streaming where academic achievement has a higher status than vocational; discipline = punishment; indigenous history not being taught properly; current struggles not being taught; the ruling-class perspective that pervades the system; children not being prepared for democratic participation; funding coming from industry distorting education; individuality/creativity discouraged; voluntary student unionism; gender role enforcement; wages inequality; capitalists own the system.

Under 'the system's underlying assumptions' we said: education is thought to be the domain of schools, not homes; not everyone has access to participation, design or ownership of education; nuclear family isolation; funding according to capitalist value of the subject; success/failure measured using a bell curve; Anglo/Saxon superiority; academic is better; if children think for themselves they will undermine society; the establishment knows best; children need to be prepared to work in a capitalist society; children are different from adults – not quite human and adults have power.

Under 'what we want to see': diversity; education for life; holistic; community based learning; project based learning; education centres that are community based and integrated into community needs; education funding that recognises the value of education; education funding according to people's needs; children and adults share power; grouping of students by interest not by age, gender, class etc; on-going work experience; teacher/student ratio decrease; discipline from within, a sense of ethics.

As you can see it was pretty wide-ranging and exciting. At every point life experiences were shared.

We also recognised that many teachers working in the current education system work very hard against the prevailing ethos.

Essentially what arose from the discussion was a desire for an education system based on a revolutionary pedagogy. Unfortunately, those seeking such a thing in our society are pretty well forced out of the government system.

The existing SA education policy, as displayed on our website, is largely silent on these issues.

Resolution for conference

Our branch directed me to put as a resolution at the national conference the following: "That Socialist Alliance establishes an e-mail discussion loop to formulate a progressive education policy ready for discussion at next year's conference."

This discussion group would not be directly discussing the industrial issues of comrades who are teachers, though obviously we would support them. The thrust of the discussion would be the formulation of a policy that can inspire the love of education in the whole population and express the vision of socialism.

Resolution on Aboriginal communities for conference

Moved by Nick Ingman (Adelaide branch)

1. Our duty is to work closely with Aboriginal communities, to prevent them from having to go it alone and be vulnerable to the attacks of the Howard Government.
2. We understand that the Survival of Aboriginal people is again seriously under threat, and the situation is as dire as it's ever been, effectively as bad as the situation in Iraq, or any other 3rd world situation - if not worse.
3. Our understanding is that the capitalist system, which came with Captain Cook, and the environmental destruction that it has brought, is an attack on Aboriginal spiritual connections with the land and traditional communism, where the law was to care, share and help each other.
4. If we can develop a serious solidarity, then some of the attacks can be alleviated, with the threat of the revolution hanging over the head of the Howard government, so in this way the long term can help the short term.
5. We understand that it is in all of our interest to allow access for the Aboriginal elders to our circle so that we, as the socialist alliance, can do our best to share what tools of protection we have with Aboriginal communities against the Howard government.

Proposed Amendments to conference resolutions

Moved by Alison Thorne and Peter Murray

1. National Executive resolutions on Australian politics for National Conference

Amendment by way of replacement.

Delete resolutions 4 and 5 and insert:

"The Socialist Alliance has a strategic orientation to all working class struggles and reaffirms our long term commitment to organising in unions, to building the anti-war movement and all campaigns for social and economic justice, such as justice for Indigenous people, to free the refugees and for women's, lesbian and gay and civil rights. Socialist Alliance opposes the privatisation of and cutbacks to, public services such as health, energy, water and social services.

In the next period we will actively intervene in campaigns against the Coalition government's industrial relations laws, its so-called welfare reforms, its attack on women's rights and civil rights and its assimilationist policies towards Indigenous people. We do this with the aim of building militant campaigns that can defend and extend the rights of all working and poor people."

Renumber following resolutions accordingly.

Rationale:

The current wording seems to imply that only union struggles can be left wing. It also compartmentalises other social movements from the union movement and reflects the view that only left wing unions can organise militant struggles. Further, it downplays, for example, the leading role Socialist Alliance has played in organising in support of the Indigenous communities of Redfern and Palm Island against police killings. Elsewhere it is proposed that SA work to build strong union community coalitions against the Howard government. This surely means valuing the struggles of communities equally with those of unions. The fight to defend unionism is a vital one, but it is not the only priority the Alliance faces in the next year.

2. Resolutions on the Anti-war movement

Amendment by way of addition to resolution 1.

Add after "...economic plunder plans."

"Socialists in the anti-war movement also need to explain clearly how capitalism breeds war. To this end, when Socialist Alliance members speak for Socialist Alliance within the anti-war movement, they make this connection clear."

Rationale:

Socialists should not make concessions to pacifist and other elements who argue in effect that capitalism can be reformed to stop wars. Neo-liberalism is imperialism and imperialism causes war. We need to say that when we speak as representatives of the Alliance.

3. Resolutions on SA's Trade Union work

Amendment by way of addition to resolution 6.

In the first sentence after "... refugee rights" add "and women's reproductive and Indigenous rights."

Rationale:

Both are important questions for working people. Childcare is a vital demand for women workers, and the fight for compensation for Stolen Wages and for compensation for the Indigenous former workers at the Baryulgil asbestos mine are surely union struggles, being about equal pay and the right to a safe and health workplace, regardless of race.

4. Resolution on the SA-GLW relationship

Counterposed motion to both the GLW Ed board and the NAC motions.

"That this conference ends the GLW trial and welcomes the role of all affiliate and Socialist Alliance publications in promoting and building the Socialist Alliance."

Rationale:

FSP has always opposed this project, which elevates GLW above the publications of other affiliates. This is not an attack on GLW itself, but the project has clearly stalled. The NAC's proposal seems to us to be postponing the inevitable demise of the relationship, and the Ed board's slightly amended propositions, already rejected by the National Executive, are an undemocratic attempt to solve the political impasse through expulsion of dissenters.

Motion on the SA-GLW trial project and revised recommendations of the SA-GLW Board

Moved by Louise Walker, Lalitha Chelliah and Raul Bassi (Non-affiliated National Convenors)

?? This 2005 National Conference of the Socialist Alliance reaffirms its commitment to the trial relationship with Green Left Weekly, as agreed in November, 2003, the protocols that were accepted by Conference in 2004 and changes adopted in the review of December 2004, all with a view to transforming GLW into the paper of the Alliance.

?? The 2005 National Conference of the Socialist Alliance reaffirms the structure and spirit established by these protocols, which were for diverse political representation on the SA-GLW Editorial Board. They reflect the diversity of the Alliance as an organisation in transition to becoming a multi-tendency socialist party (MTSP). They do this through the inclusion of a minimum of one dedicated position representing the interests of small affiliates, with a possibility of further positions being held by non-DSP affiliates, and an overall majority of Board positions allocated to non-DSP representatives, elected from the floor of National Conference.

?? The 2005 National Conference of the Socialist Alliance reaffirms that the size of the Board remain at a minimum of 12, as decided by the 2004 National Conference, with the aim of developing more diverse yet active participation of SA members on it.

?? The 2005 National Conference instructs the SA-GLW Board to present a report on its work no later than six months from now, and earlier if it has any problems pursuing its charter.

Rationale:

We appreciate the work of those on the SA-GLW Editorial Board since last National Conference, and thank comrades for the time and effort they have put into it to date. As the resolution above indicates, we thoroughly support the Socialist Alliance continuing a trial relationship with GLW over the coming year.

However, the SA-GLW Board report and recommendations before this National Conference do not accord with the spirit and purpose of the SA-GLW trial as adopted by last year's Conference. If they are adopted they would (despite protestations from the SA-GLW Board to the contrary) in practice mean collapsing the work actually intended of the SA-GLW Board into the work of the GLW Editorial Board itself.

The SA-GLW trial is a flagship project for the transformation of the Socialist Alliance from a united-front style electoral alliance into an MTSP. The existing SA-GLW protocols and structure are precisely for the purpose of transformation as a precursor to the integration of the work of the two Boards. The process adopted by the 2004 Conference requires the actual integration of the political diversity of SA within the pages of GLW before it can proceed to the very final stage of integrating with the GLW Board, having gotten the project to the point where a diverse range of Socialist Alliance members can recognise from its pages that GLW is its own paper.

Removing small affiliate and/or dissenting voices from the SA-GLW Board is to walk away from the SA-GLW trial's core purpose: planning, initiating, demonstrating and winning the case for transformation and political integration.

There is nothing in the SA-GLW Board's written report to demonstrate that the requisite transformation of GLW content has occurred or is generally underway. Furthermore, the bulk of articles that do take up SA movement work feature prominent SA comrades such as Chris Cain and Craig Johnston, and are part of the normal editorial work of the GLW Board itself through DSP contributors. That reporting would appear in GLW in any case - without the existence of SA-GLW Board itself. There is also evidence to suggest that the SA-GLW Board has been struggling with its charter in other ways. For example, it has had trouble even gaining copy from a diverse range of new or alternative SA voices for the regular Socialist Alliance column 'Our Common Cause'. During discussion of this matter on the National Executive in the lead-up to this Conference, the SA-GLW Board cited difficulty finding non-affiliated and other SA members to be involved in the Board's work of organising copy for GLW that would not normally be contributed by

DSP members. This is a genuine problem that needs to be addressed constructively and supportively by both this Conference and the SA-GLW Board, if the project is to move forward.

But recognising this problem does not mean that the Socialist Alliance should walk away from the project. We should neither abandon the relationship altogether nor skip the essential intermediate process of integrating and reflecting the diverse voices of SA as we originally decided. Given the deeply held political differences in Socialist Alliance, especially between affiliate organisations, making GLW look and feel like something that SA's non-DSP membership would embrace as their paper is not easy. That is the precise challenge for the SA-GLW Board. On a small scale, it reflects the general tasks that must be undertaken for the Alliance to become a multi-tendency socialist party: it is also only through careful relationship-building based on our recognition and balancing of a wide range of often conflicting but progressive views that we will actually achieve genuine integration of political opinion across SA as a whole.

Motion on proposals to restructure the leadership bodies of the Socialist Alliance

Moved by Louise Walker, Lalitha Chelliah and Raul Bassi (Non-affiliated National Convenors)

That the 2005 National Conference delay its decisions on the various National Executive re-structuring proposals and re-elect a National Executive upon the basis of the current arrangements, pending a full Alliance post-conference discussion and review coordinated by the incoming National Executive, for decision at the next National Conference, or through an earlier special national conference should that be considered appropriate by the National Executive.

Rationale:

There is no immediate National Executive leadership crisis requiring such a dramatic, last-minute, and controversial leadership re-structure as is presently being proposed. Any of the proposals, but especially the one moving away from a representative leadership model that has shaped the Alliance since inception, will entail a significant transformation of the current character of the Alliance.

This needs more discussion than the few weeks since this non-representative leadership re-structure proposal was first floated and more agreement than has been achieved to date, as evidenced by the contrasting perspectives discussion earlier and competing re-structure proposals.

The Socialist Alliance needs a calm, measured, comradely, unity focused, and considered review period, led by the incoming National Executive. If, in the opinion of the incoming National Executive, that review outcome warrants a special national conference or that resolved leadership structure matters can simply go through to decision at next conference, then that should be fine.

We need maximum unity in the upcoming fightback against the Howard agenda. Let's try to heal the multiple divisions on this question before we impose one side's 'solution' on the entire Alliance.

Towards a socialist approach to complementary and alternative medicine

Nick Fredman and Kath O'Driscoll (Northern Rivers branch)

The purpose of this contribution is to sketch some of the main issues around complementary and alternative medicine and to put a resolution to national conference for a policy amendment. It is in first instance a response to the contributions of Carl Kenner but also an answer to what are probably widespread misconceptions.

A major problem with comrade Kenner's contributions is his lumping together of, and making gross generalisations about, a huge range of distinct therapies and practices. It is true that in western countries one can make a general distinction between a dominant, orthodox form of medicine, and therapies that are commonly understood and referred to as "alternative", including western herbalism, osteopathy, naturopathy, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Indian ayurvedic medicine and various tactile therapies. A term that is somewhat more precise and accepted in the relevant literature is complementary and alternative medicines (CAMs).

Such therapies are hardly marginal however, and many are getting less "alternative". By the late 1990s 57% of Australians and 42% of Americans were using CAMs each yearⁱ. In 1997 there were more visits by Americans to CAM practitioners (629 million) than to primary care physicians (386 million), and in 2003 in Australia there were 1.9 million CAM consultations. Also by the late 1990s CAMs were being taken more seriously by governments and health regulators, as evidenced by several government reviews In the US and Australia, new specialised journals, dedicated sections in medical journals, CAM courses in public universities and the teaching of basic CAM in medical schoolsⁱⁱ.

Such a hugely popular set of health care practices — involving increasing amounts of research and increasing numbers of trained and educated practitioners, and used by large numbers of working people for overwhelmingly pragmatic rather than esoteric reasonsⁱⁱⁱ — deserves to be taken seriously, in terms of how it can be part of an overall approach of promoting the health and wellbeing of individuals and society as a whole in a socially just way. To do this

properly it would be necessary to situate CAM therapies within the history and political economy of medicine. We can only sketch a few points here.

Alternative medicine: just a rip-off?

Socialists who criticise alternative medicine for the extent that it is commodified (as Carl does) are entirely missing the point. Almost everything under capitalism is commodified, and increasingly so under monopolistic, late capitalism, as giant corporations seek new fields for exploitation in the endless quest to maximise profits. Particular corporations (e.g. Pfizer, Proctor and Gamble) dominate every aspect of medicine, from research and training to supply and regulation, meaning choices aren't made according to some value-free norm of science and rationality, but are made according to, or are at least distorted by, the profit motive.

So how did the current state of medicine in advanced capitalist countries come about?

A very brief history of western medicine

Many people imagine that the modern medical establishment developed from a gradual and logical evolution from previous health practices as scientific knowledge advanced. However, while scientific theory and practice can be relatively autonomous from social structure and ideology, it is non-materialist to think there is no connection, especially in the health sciences, in which there are a lot of assumptions about the individual and society, and from which (under capitalism) a great deal of profits can be made. We'll look at this from the perspective of western medicine, understanding that the history of medicine is quite different in other parts of the world and is beyond the scope of this contribution. Looking at the history of medicine in western countries, we can see that the rise to dominance of what is currently orthodox medicine wasn't just a matter of best science, but was often also a political struggle between forms of medicine and the social interests involved in them.

Modern western medicine developed in the context of the rise of industrial capitalism. It has always co-existed with some older forms of medicine, such as herbalism, and some more recent forms, such as homeopathy. A number of factors combined to make modern western medicine focus on invasive techniques, discrete individuals and isolated systems of the body, administered by a caste of doctors. Medicine as a distinct science was based on the mechanical materialism of the seventeenth century Enlightenment (the philosophical basis of the bourgeois revolutions of from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries). That is, the belief that the world is made up of discrete parts which can be analysed in isolation from each other, and that a theory or understanding of a certain part can then be reached. The idea of the bio-mechanical body and the assumption that the body worked in the same way as a machine was an extension of this reductionist view of the world (as opposed to Marxist dialectical materialism). Also relevant is the individualist ideology of the rising bourgeoisie, which derives from the market being the basis for all social relations under capitalism.

A significant figure in the struggle over medicine in early capitalist society was Nicolas Culpepper (1616–1654), plebian revolutionary democrat and medical herbalist. Culpepper had fought with the Parliamentary forces in the English revolution, and despite being a trained doctor, scandalised the medical establishment with his radical views and practices. He was a passionate advocate for the poor, providing free health care and shunning the use of expensive medicines, instead utilising the plants that grew abundantly in people's gardens. He translated medical texts, previously available only in Latin for the elite doctors, into English for the apothecaries and ordinary people^{iv}. However, like the radical democratic wing of the pre-twentieth century bourgeois revolutions in general, he was fighting the forces of history.

During the nineteenth century it became increasingly profitable for emerging industrial corporations to produce and market synthetic, mass-produced drugs, and to stamp out any opposition such as herbs that anyone could grow. Related to the interests of these corporations were the interests of doctors as a professional caste in monopolising skills and monopolising the right to dispense recognised medicine. Significantly, the Rockefeller Foundation played a key role in the emergence of the American Medical Association and in their successful competition with herbalists and homeopaths^v.

Modern western medicine has of course led to numerous drugs and surgical techniques that are of great benefit to society. But its invasive, bio-mechanistic nature and the distortions to research by the profit motive have led to harmful outcomes, e.g. the thalidomide disaster, the recent recall of arthritis medication Vioxx (after causing heart attacks in users), and reports of violent reactions to the anti-depressant Zoloft, and to general dissatisfaction.

This is the basis for rising popularity in western countries of traditional western and eastern forms of medicine and more recent alternative therapies. Many of these have more holistic (that is, dialectical), and preventative approaches that would be highly useful in the community-based, social medicine model envisaged in current SA policy.

Empirical and clinical validation of complementary therapies

In orthodox western medicine the strongest form of validation for a medical therapy is seen as a double blind randomised controlled trial. Many traditional remedies have empirical validation from centuries of use and documentation in classical medical literature, however until recently there has been little funding available for clinical double blind trials into alternative medicine, generally due to lack of potential profits. So far evidence of efficacy from such trials is strong for many uses of acupuncture, some herbal medicines and some of the manual therapies^{vi}.

In any case double blind trials are not necessarily the best form of validation in every instance. Such trials did not prevent the marketing of the harmful drugs mentioned above. They can be effective in measuring the actions of specific

remedies on specific systems, but not necessarily for validating preventative and holistic care (or for that matter surgical techniques).

Recently, the idea of a “whole systems approach” to research design has been put forward by a group of Canadian scientists, practitioners, and policy makers as a way of validating CAM^{vii}. With such techniques and also further double blind testing we can expect a greater range of such therapies to be validated.

Current SA health policy

Carl does have a point in that all the current Socialist Alliance health policy has to say on any complementary, traditional or alternative therapies is that Medicare should be extended to “alternative medicine”. Not all such therapies are equally validated, and there is certainly a need for greater public regulation, as called for by responsible practitioners and associations. Our health policy should reflect both these concerns, and the potential for CAMs to be integrated into a democratically planned, community-based, socialist health system. We urge delegates to reject Carl’s motions, which are based on a scientifically erroneous pseudo-rationalism, and/or take an inappropriate (for a political organisation) stand on contentious scientific issues.

The following proposed amendment to SA health policy is adapted from the ‘Complementary and Alternative Health Care’ section of Greens health policy^{viii}, with some changes to reflect the fact that our policy should not just contain specific reforms but should also point to the socialist organisation of society.

Resolution: Proposed health policy amendment

That the following sub-section be added to the Socialist Alliance Health Charter, before the sub-section on Patient’s Rights:

“Complementary and alternative medicine

The Socialist Alliance recognises that complementary and alternative therapies, if properly regulated, can play an important role in a democratically-run, community based health system that focuses on prevention and education.

The Socialist Alliance will: increase provision in public institutions of education and training in complementary and alternative therapies that are supported by independent research and evaluation; ensure that healthcare practitioners who advise or prescribe complementary or alternative medicines are appropriately trained and competent; extend Medicare to cover the services of such practitioners; employ such practitioners as appropriate in public hospitals and Community Health Centres; increase public research and evaluation of complementary and alternative medicines; regulate and where appropriate nationalise the supply of complementary and alternative medicines to ensure they meet the required standards of safety, quality and efficacy.”

i. NAC was the name used at the 2003 conference by a group of SA members, not belonging to any affiliate group, who united behind a call for the Alliance to become a MTSP. But it is very unclear just who NAC is today because some of those signatories do not support the “third way” course of the three national convenors, as Andrew Watson’s contribution in *Alliance Voices* Vol. 5 No. 5 makes shows.

ⁱⁱ Bensoussan, A. Complementary medicine — where lies its appeal? *Medical Journal of Australia*. 1999; 170: 247-248. The 2003 figure is from Bensoussan, A. et. al. A survey of the complementary medicine workforce. *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*. 2004; 12(1): 17–27.

ⁱⁱⁱ This point is stressed by Bensoussan, 1999.

^{iv} Giggs, B. *Green Pharmacy: The History and Evolution of Western Herbal Medicine*. Vermont, Healing Arts Press, 1991.

^v Brown ER. *Rockerfeller Medicine Man: Medicine and Capitalism in America*. Berkeley, University of California Press 1979.

^{vi} World Health Organisation. Traditional medicine. Fact Sheet No 134. 2003. [Online]. Available: www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs134/en/print.html

^{vii} Ritenbaugh C, Verhoef M, Fleishman S, Boon H, Leis A Whole systems research: a discipline for studying complementary and alternative medicine. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*. 2003. Jul-Aug; 9(4):32-6.

^{viii} www.greens.org.au/policies/services/health