

DISCUSSION
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DOCUMENTS

Motion on Socialist Alliance carried by the December 7-8 ISO National Conference

Given the division within the organisation about our continued participation in the Socialist Alliance and the lack of clarity and general consensus within the group about such a major decision:

The organisation will open up a period of discussion regarding participation and work in the Socialist Alliance.

There will be two internal bulletins and a members meeting in each city before the next National Committee meeting after the New South Wales election which will review our participation.

Carried

Letter to the ISO National Executive from the DSP Political Committee

5 December 2002

Dear comrades,

At this morning's meeting between a delegation representing the ISO National Executive (comrades Brian Webb and Ian Rintoul) and one from the DSP Political Committee (comrades John Percy, Peter Boyle and Dick Nichols) it was agreed that it would be useful—in the light of the forthcoming national conference of the ISO—for the DSP to spell out its perspective on building the Socialist Alliance in the coming period.

At the outset the DSP wants to make it crystal clear that it views the participation of the ISO in the Socialist Alliance as critically important. ISO comrades are making an invaluable contribution to building the Alliance. We would therefore view any ISO decision to withdraw from the Alliance as seriously damaging to the prospect of building left and socialist unity in Australia. We commit ourselves to doing everything in our power to minimise that possibility.

The success of the Alliance to date has rested in considerable degree, though of course not exclusively, on the ability of ISO and DSP comrades to collaborate “on the ground”—despite the ongoing differences we have. We in the DSP are anxious for that collaboration to continue—as all other affiliates and the Alliance membership as a whole surely are. Together we really do make a difference.

We cannot stress enough that the Alliance is a precious gain for the socialist cause in this country and that it's the responsibility of each and every one of us to work at strengthening it. The results obtained in the November 30 Victorian state poll are the most recent confirmation of its value as an electoral front of the socialist movement. They show that the Alliance has articulated a definite, though still small, electoral support base, but one that is real enough for it to be able to exercise a consistent pressure on the Greens from the left—provided that we all continue to build on the foundation established. The forthcoming New South Wales election provides the Alliance with an invaluable opportunity to expand its influence.

Secondly, the work done by the Alliance in other areas (trade union solidarity, against the impending war on Iraq, for refugee rights) has clearly shown what can

be achieved when the left acts together. The projections recently adopted by the Socialist Alliance National Executive—and based on the November 11 ISO letter to the DSP—recognise that reality and provide a solid basis for expanding the Alliance's work in the unions and the movements.

Thirdly, the decision of the DSP to withdraw the proposal to its 20th Congress that it transform itself into an internal tendency within the Alliance from January 2003 means that the Alliance's own debate can now focus on the best way forward for building the Alliance itself. That debate is already under way—with increasing and important participation from unaffiliated members—and will determine how the Alliance can best move ahead from its May 2003 National Conference.

The DSP leadership is committed to making sure that our party's collective contribution to the debate focuses upon making as accurate and objective an analysis as possible of the real shifts taking place in Australian politics and upon how best the openings these offer should be grasped by the Alliance.

We think this is the best framework within which to carry forward the discussion on the outstanding differences within the Alliance, including those between the DSP and the ISO, in particular our discussions over how the “break from Labor” is taking place and over whether collaboration within the Alliance is organically part of or separate from the process of socialist regroupment.

However, we do not see these and other issues being “settled” by a vote at the May conference, nor does further advance by the Alliance depend on us all reaching agreement on the questions in dispute, important though the effort to minimise differences always is. Furthermore, while the DSP remains committed to the perspective of the Alliance being transformed over time into a multi-tendency socialist party, this remains a *perspective*. We will seek to convince Alliance members that it is the best way forward, but whether it comes about—if at all—will be determined by the Alliance debate itself.

What the DSP will propose to the Alliance conference (and to the Socialist Alliance National Executive) in the way of practical steps forward will be conditioned by the positions and interventions of the ISO

and other affiliates in the Alliance debate—along with the general evolution of the Alliance’s work and discussion. In developing such proposals we will continue to act in the spirit with which we have acted to date—arguing strongly for our viewpoint but always trying to move ahead on the basis of consensus or the largest possible majority.

In particular this means that there will be no automatic, predetermined decision on the part of the incoming DSP leadership to recommend to our National Committee that the DSP transform itself into an internal tendency within the Alliance after the Alliance’s May National Conference. Any such decision—like all others we make in relation to the Alliance—will emerge only as a result of the Alliance debate, of the decisions of the Alliance’s National Conference and after the broadest possible consultation, with the ISO and all other affiliates.

Our last point is this: the Alliance needs to grow, by converting its more passive members into active mem-

bers, and by recruiting new members from the considerable pool of support revealed in our election results. The DSP will propose to the next meeting of the Socialist Alliance National Executive that the Alliance launch a recruitment campaign in the first months of 2003. The more successful this is, the more effective will be our practical work—especially for the 2003 NSW poll—and the richer will be the Alliance debate and the better the decisions of its May conference, reflecting as they will a broader range of experience and thought.

On such a basis we can seriously advance our shared desire to transform the affiliate organisations into a small minority within the Alliance at the same time as laying the groundwork for more effective collaboration in the future. ■

John Percy
National Secretary

The DSP and the Socialist Alliance

By Workers Power

[The following commentary was published in Workers Power Australia, Issue Number 30, December 2002.]

In early September the Democratic Socialist party announced to the rest of the Socialist Alliance its intention to reconstitute itself as a tendency of the Alliance from January 2003 and to cease intervening publically as the DSP.

In the couple of months since then, the Socialist Alliance has been through a period of very open and intense discussion; some of the most intense in its eighteen month existence.

Then in early November, the International Socialist Organisation made the announcement that if the DSP went through with their proposal and their January Congress voted in favour of it—the ISO would have to withdraw from the Alliance. This should have come as no shock to people following the discussion, particularly the ISO’s insistence that the Socialist Alliance be a broad organisation and that there was thus a need to retain a revolutionary one separately.

The DSP were left with no choice and shortly afterwards announced that though they would continue to work towards greater left unity through the Alliance, they would not be making the proposal to the January Congress.

What the discussion has done is put the whole issue of the nature of the Socialist Alliance back on the agenda for all members to think about and discuss. And this can only be a good thing.

The DSP state they are for the building of a revolutionary party. But when pushed on how this would practically look they appear to be suggesting only a slightly more comprehensive program to the one the Alliance currently has. In fact the model they seem to be using is the Scottish Socialist Party. Which for all its rhetoric essentially has a program of left reformism.

The DSP say this kind of party is desirable so that all the various far left forces in Australia today would be able to find a single political home.

They say given most of the left groups in Australia, certainly the ones affiliated to the Socialist Alliance, have 95 per cent or 98 per cent agreement, then we should be less worried about the things we do disagree on.

The assertion is simple—we have worked together for the last eighteen months and found reasonable compromises. Why can’t we go on working together, agreeing to disagree on a few issues, but within the framework of one large group.

The DSP, having suggested they would stop separate campaigning and campaign only as the Socialist Alliance, have been hoping other affiliates of the Socialist Alliance would do the same. That challenge went out particularly to the ISO—the second largest of the affiliates.

But the ISO don’t want a bar of it. They are clear, they want the Socialist Alliance to be an electoral alliance only. For that reason they don’t want it to even call itself a revolutionary party, let alone actually adopt programmatic positions that would point it in that direction. That’s because they see themselves as being the core for a future revolutionary party and they want to build that rather than some centrist bloc.

And it’s true that the DSP seem to be fudging the nature of this change they want to see in the Socialist Alliance, fudging in fact the difference between reform and revolution.

Though they say in one breath they want a revolutionary party, they are also saying that the exact program would have to be sorted through in practice.

Which sounds fine till one starts to think about the specifics.

It is only three years ago that the DSP called for Australian and UN troops to go into East Timor, a position they defend till this day. They don't recognise the regime in Cuba as a Stalinist one and see no need for political revolution. And when challenged on these points they resort to saying that a party in Australia doesn't need to be so concerned about international issues if it can agree on what to do on the ground in Australia.

But of course the issue of East Timor and the continuing participation of Australian troops in a number of "peacekeeping" missions in the Asia-Pacific region is and should be the immediate concern of the Australian working class and therefore of any party that might claim leadership.

The DSP would like all the groups in the Socialist Alliance to also dissolve themselves at some point and for the Alliance to become some sort of multi-tendency party. Right now that would mean being part of a party with a fudged program that could not be clear about reform or revolution, which did not have any or any consistent internationalist positions and which at best would be a compromise on the issues that the various tendencies could not agree on.

Workers Power recognise that while many positions that the Socialist Alliance has taken in the last eighteen months have been well to the left of either the Labor Party or the Greens and that on issues like the internal fight in the AMWU it has been able to quite courageously take sides and fight for union democracy, that nevertheless the positions have often been compromises and ones which therefore sacrificed the clarity of really revolutionary positions.

On the war on Iraq for example, the Alliance has said no to the war and Australian involvement, no to sanctions and a stop to the war on the Palestinian people. All reasonable demands in themselves. But it has been unable to go that one further and necessary step—to take a position of revolutionary defeatism—even though this is the public position (in one form or another) of most of its constituent parts.

This failure is because of the desire of both the DSP and the ISO to build something which is not actually a revolutionary party but a party which is to the left of the current Labor Party policies.

So far Workers Power believe that the opportunity to openly talk about what sort of party the working class in Australia (and internationally) need is a positive thing. We will be taking this opportunity to talk about what a revolutionary Socialist Alliance would look like, what positions it would have, what program it would need to adopt, what action it would take in the class struggle.

But we are clear, we don't want a half-way house to revolution; we don't want something that fudges the difference between reform and revolution. We think you have to speak the truth, and the truth is that the Australian working class, especially at a time when we are being dragged into an imperialist conflict, needs a revolutionary party. Our job, the job of the whole socialist left in Australia isn't to find excuses not to build such a party—it's to try and convince our brothers and sisters that there can be no second best and that whatever their doubts, this is the way forward.■

Stay in the Socialist Alliance! An open letter to the ISO

By Workers' Liberty

[The following open letter to the International Socialist Organisation has been published by Workers Liberty, one of the socialist groups affiliated to the Socialist Alliance in Australia. It appeared in "Workers' Liberty" Number 28.]

Dear comrades,

According to your letter to the DSP of 29 September 2002: "In the space of just 18 months, [the Socialist Alliance] has begun to establish itself among hundreds of non-aligned working-class activists, and has contributed to a much more comradely atmosphere among affiliates".

Now, however, you are actively considering pulling out from the Alliance. Your conference on December 7-8 resolved to open a discussion on this option and to decide after the New South Wales state elections.

We urge you to stay in the Alliance and to join with us in fighting to develop the Alliance into a core for a genuine working-class political party.

In the 20th century, after 1917, the chances for working-class socialist revolution were aborted, essentially by the effects of Stalinism (including its rebound effect in extending the hold of social democracy over

the working class in many countries). Socialists at the start of the 21st century have a more open field before us. But much of the very language of our movement has suffered through being annexed for so long by Stalinism. For example, many young activists today describe themselves as "anti-capitalist", but shy away from the words "communist" or even "socialist".

We need to rebuild a socialist political culture, remedying the deformations imposed even on anti-Stalinists by the decades of Stalinist domination of the left, and at the same time coming to terms with a radically changed world capitalist system and world working class. That work requires intense self-education, discussion and debate among already committed socialists. At the same time we have to reach out.

For decades our comrades, the revolutionary socialist opponents of both capitalism and Stalinism, addressed themselves to, and moved among, primarily workers and youth who had already come to identify as "socialist" in a broad sense by reference to a culture sustained primarily by the Stalinist and social-democratic parties. That culture has not vanished, and will not vanish tomorrow. We share your concern to

have the Alliance appeal to people who identify as “old Labor”, although we disagree with your idea that the Alliance can best do that by pretending, implausibly, to be “old Labor” (a rather diluted variety of “old Labor”) itself. Nevertheless, that culture is waning. More and more today we have the opportunity, and the task, to “make socialists’ among young people whose only notion and knowledge of socialism will be what we can take to them.

With the decline of the old Stalinist and social democratic political labour movements, we can, and we must, address ourselves to a wider and more diffuse audience, with fewer fixed points of reference.

Work together

The Socialist Alliance is valuable because it allows us to work together; to establish a basis of common activity which can make our debates more fruitful; to pursue those debates and discussions; and, by combining our forces, to reach out to broad, raw audiences in election work (the main area, in bourgeois democracies, where such large audiences can be reached) on a much bigger scale than we could do if we all worked separately. We do not exaggerate what the Alliance has achieved so far; but to quit it now would be to move not forwards but backwards, to the stage we were at before we launched the Alliance.

Your doubts about continuing the Alliance have been prompted mainly by the DSP’s suggestion that they would dissolve as a party and organise instead as a “Democratic Socialist Tendency” inside the Alliance. You saw that as a move to force the development of the Alliance and to convert it essentially into an annex of the DSP, with yourselves as a trapped minority. The DSP has shelved its suggestion for now, but you still see it as a threat.

No doubt the DSP does want to win hegemony in the Alliance, and would strive to use its “dissolution” as a step towards converting the Alliance into an enlarged and renamed version of the DSP. The outcome, however, will depend, on political struggle. It will depend on that in any case. The Alliance cannot continue forever as a diplomatic link-up. Life will pose issues on which the Alliance will have to define itself. You should be part of the struggle, not opt out of it.

You seem to see the Alliance too much as a diplomatic arrangement between yourselves and the DSP, and one which is now breaking down because the DSP is being too pushy. We urge you to see it instead as a framework for thrashing out politics, by argument and debate, among many hundreds of socialists. Do not run away from the DSP and leave the Alliance’s hundreds of unaffiliated members in the pocket of the DSP. Do not regard the DSP members and periphery as just automatic transmission mechanisms for some fixed set of politics. Join with us in a battle to get more politics, and more political debate and self-education, in the Alliance.

Debates

We know that political struggles are not conducted like dispassionate, even-handed debates in the Forum of ancient Athens. We do not underestimate the weight

of the DSP’s considerable resources in material assets and staff. We know it is possible to win a debate yet lose the vote. Even then it is much better to take part in the struggle, and to face exclusion, if it comes to that, together with others we have convinced in the struggle, than to opt out in advance. At the very least we learn more.

As Trotsky put it: “Revolutionists are tempered not only during strikes and street battles but, first of all, during struggles for the correct policies of their own party”.

Two options

Either revert to the old pattern in which the left operates as an archipelago of small groups, each with its own circle of campaigns, meetings, and contacts, with the seas between the islands almost impassable, and the dialect spoken on one island scarcely comprehensible to the inhabitants of the next one. Or, push on, through experiences like the Socialist Alliance, to a revival and recomposition of working-class politics in the years and decades ahead, and the maximum intervention of Marxist ideas and debates into that recomposition.

The first option makes sense only if we believe that one of the small groups has, through some peculiar inspiration, already acquired for itself all the essential political and theoretical ideas needed to make a Marxist party, and needs only to be clever and energetic enough in popularising itself. (And in that case, why wouldn’t it have achieved absolute dominance on the left already?)

You complain that the DSP proposal could collapse the Alliance into a “revolutionary party”, or alternatively into a “broad party”, not revolutionary enough, whereas it should be sustained as an “electoral united front”. But it is politically false to see Chinese walls separating those three categories, “electoral united front”, “broad party”, and “revolutionary party”.

Electoral agitation, which is aimed at the broadest audience and should therefore be limited to a few, simple, clear-cut ideas, is properly a lot simpler and cruder than the general writing and speaking of a socialist organisation, much of which is aimed at narrower audiences (active trade unionists; trade unionists in struggle; campaign activists; etc.) One-off “electoral united fronts’ may be possible with all sorts of people.

But, fundamentally, consistent socialists cannot have one set of politics for the activists, and another for the broader working-class electorate. If we put one set of politics to the voters, then, to be true to ourselves, we must be active for those politics outside election time too. Unless we are to appear as, and be, ordinary bourgeois-electoralist hypocrites, then the politics of our activity outside election times must be defended by us at election time too. A consistent “electoral united front”, maintained over a solid stretch of time during which it must define itself in relation to wars, strikes, and political crises, can only be a party. You want the Alliance to be a “home for those looking for a left alternative to Labor”? Excellent. What sort of home? One where the housemates discuss the issues freely and equally, and progressively acquire clearer collective politics? Or one where the new residents, the disillu-

sioned Laborites, are allowed into the kitchen only on special (electoral?) occasions, and otherwise have to stay in their rooms and entertain themselves while the real “revolutionaries” run things?

Broad party

About a “broad party”, you write that “*because* [our emphasis] such a party should not, and would not, be a revolutionary party, it would need to afford clear and permanent platform rights for revolutionary currents such as ourselves’. By what logic can we say a broad party should not be revolutionary? Of what class-struggle test can we say that the party should fail it? That we would not even try to convince the broad party to take an independent working-class stand? Which war would we want the “broad party” not to oppose, which workers’ struggle would we want it not to support, which socialist principle would we want it to flout? Of course the struggle to make such a “broad party” revolutionary should be waged not by futile administrative coups (packing the appropriate meetings and voting through a decision to be “revolutionary” over the heads of the uncomprehending or aggrieved members) but by convincing the members in broad and open debate. But it should be waged.

Of course that struggle requires democracy, including platform rights for different factions. But democracy is not something wanted just “because the party is not revolutionary”. A party, or group, cannot dispense with the need for democracy just by declaring itself “revolutionary”. How can it remain “revolutionary” in response to new challenges? What is its mechanism for getting back on course if its leadership, previously “revolutionary”, proves less-than-revolutionary in some new situation?

Revolutionary party

A revolutionary party is defined as revolutionary not by a desire (however sincere) to lead a revolution at some unknown time in the future, nor indeed by any one-off decision. It is defined as revolutionary by its

constant striving to respond in a revolutionary way—that is, according to the logic of the class struggle, with the maximum of active, independent, working-class initiative—to daily politics. Any real socialist organisation is “revolutionary” not as a fixed state of being, but only as a measure of some success in that striving.

And the revolutionary organisation reaches the level of being a party, a real party, only when it gets beyond the stage of being an ideological grouping (which we are all at now) and organises a decisive contingent of the most militant workers, the leaders of struggle in the workplaces and the communities. To be a real party it must be “broad” as well as “revolutionary”.

Underpinning your feelings here, it seems, is the assumption that the normal and natural condition on the left is to have a small “revolutionary party” (“revolutionary” by fixed self-proclamation, and therefore not needing to allow any “platform rights” or large space for dispute inside its ranks) on one side, and various “broad” groupings and “united fronts” on the other with which the “revolutionary party” may or may not involve itself depending on its assessment of “moods” and the “gate receipts” to be got. It is an assumption which impoverishes your politics. Explaining your turn to the Socialist Alliance at your “Marxism 2001” weekend school, David Glanz recalled Engels’ idea of the class struggle being on three fronts, economic, ideological, and political. The ISO, he said, had long been active on the economic and ideological fronts. By turning to the Socialist Alliance it was taking up the political front, too. Essentially he was right. To turn back the old pre-Alliance ways would be to impoverish your activity—to reduce it to a combination of immediate struggle cheering (“smash” this, “stop” that, etc.) and abstract preaching (“one solution, revolution”).

In comradeship,
Workers’ Liberty ■

Socialist Alliance in review — The long and winding road

By Riki Lane (*Workers’ Liberty*)

[The following article appeared in “*Workers’ Liberty*” Number 28. Riki Lane is a National Co-convenor of Socialist Alliance.]

From tentative beginnings, Socialist Alliance is finding its feet and developing a clear sense of purpose and of its future. This may seem a surprising statement given recent ructions. However, if you look beyond the surface, it is clear how far we have come.

Elections

In Victoria, many more comrades were actively involved in the recent State election campaign than in previous ones. This is true both for the members of affiliated groups and for independent members. Meetings and functions are increasingly well attended. There were forty participants at the Trade Union Soli-

darity Committee meeting. Thirty attended a Brunswick campaign launch.

Our vote of between 1.1 per cent and 2.6 per cent showed improvement from the vote we got in the federal election. It was a particularly difficult election to get votes, given the landslides to Labor and the Greens. Socialist Alliance is now on the map as a recognised, but minor, electoral party. Steve Jolly for the Socialist Party in Richmond saw his vote collapse from 12 per cent to 2 per cent.

The Greens’ impressive vote, over 20 per cent in four electorates, indicates a major shift to the left. Labor’s huge win, and its unprecedented control of the Upper House, mean that it has no excuses. The unions and the whole labour movement will put major demands on the government for serious reform—firstly,

for legislation knocked back by the Liberals, such as on industrial manslaughter (Premier Bracks has already announced that he will not proceed with this) and for proportional representation in the upper house.

The Greens are cementing their position as both the realistic electoral left alternative to the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and as the “middle party” between the ALP and the Liberals. They have taken over that latter role from the Democrats, while having much more credibility in campaigns and on rallies than the Democrats ever did.

Unions

Workers’ Liberty gives union work first priority, because we see Marxism as about working-class power and the unions as the basic organisations of the workers. Unions may not be the best places to recruit quickly, although Socialist Alliance has vastly more potential than any of its affiliates to attract unionists. However, unions are where we have to build strong roots if we are to build a working-class party. Independent Socialist Alliance union activists like Chris Cain and Simon Millar have given a huge boost to Socialist Alliance’s profile, activity and morale.

Both the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) and the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) are giving union work more attention than they have for a long time. This is a very positive development—but it has to be kept up as an ongoing orientation, not a passing phase. Simon Millar’s paper on the TU Solidarity Committee in Melbourne (see *Discussion Bulletin* Volume 2 Number 6) outlines some of the possibilities. This work will involve both practical questions of how to intervene in particular unions and discussion of theoretical issues in a concrete context.

Activism

Recent anti-war rallies have seen much better coordination and intervention by Socialist Alliance. Stalls, joint contingents, banners, posters—Socialist Alliance has a large and visible presence in Melbourne and Sydney and many other cities. Socialist Alliance branches have taken the lead in establishing local anti-war committees and organising local actions.

There is a lot of unevenness. Some branches are quite inactive, while others are lively. This also relates to the attitudes of local affiliates’ branches. Where they are less developed—e.g. the DSP in Adelaide, or unenthusiastic about Socialist Alliance, e.g. the ISO in Brisbane—the local Socialist Alliance branches have suffered.

DSP/ISO

From the start there have been different conceptions—the ISO’s minimalist electoral approach of a “united front of a special type”, the DSP’s hope to have a multi-tendency socialist party in which they would be the dominant force. These conceptions still have to be debated through, but there has been a lot of movement.

Workers’ Liberty welcomed the DSP’s proposal to restructure itself as a tendency in Socialist Alliance and commit its resources to building Socialist Alliance. However, we knew that proposal was putting the organisational cart before the political horse and would

not be acceptable to most other affiliates—especially the ISO. The ISO’s subsequent ultimatum, and the DSP’s backing off, actually gives us a good base from which to really develop joint work and debate out a proper basis for unity.

The National Executive of the Socialist Alliance recently unanimously adopted the following points, based on an ISO proposal, as the basis for joint work:

- *An open-ended discussion about the nature of the Alliance, and around key political questions like the nature of reformism, the nature of the trade union bureaucracy, etc. This process should lead up to the annual conference in May, but not end there.*
- *A further strengthening of union collaboration. What has been achieved to date in the NTEU [National tertiary Education Union] could be replicated in the CPSU [Community and Public Sector Union], another union where the Alliance has a relatively large membership. We should investigate in which other unions, from state to state, caucuses would be useful. We should also encourage cross-union committees like the Alliance solidarity committee in Melbourne. We should organise another round of union seminars across the country. We should strengthen our collaboration in campaign work, in particular in anti-war and refugee rights’ campaigns.*
- *Raising the Alliance profile by campaigning under its banner where we can—for instance, the Alliance is an excellent vehicle for initiating or building protests against the recent ASIO raids on Muslim families.*
- *Raising the Alliance profile more regularly and thoroughly on all rallies and at other public events, using placards, leaflets, etc. The ISO understands that this would involve making greater resources available than at present.*
- *Holding Alliance public meetings on key topics as broad platforms of the left, and organising debate across the left on contentious issues.*

This represents a major step forward from the ISO’s initial conceptions—the Socialist Alliance can act as a major vehicle for discussion and debate amongst the left, and also be an activist party where union and campaign work can be strengthened.

Towards the May National Conference

In the lead-up to the May 2003 Socialist Alliance National Conference, we can strengthen our joint work and start to debate out some of the big issues. The conference itself should set out a path towards a united multi-tendency party, setting out markers that need to be achieved. Some of these could include: reaching agreement on some central issues of how to approach the labour movement; properly functioning branches that actively involve the affiliates and independents; attracting new layers of activists; organised and regular interventions in a number of unions; establishing a regular publication that Socialist Alliance can actually support.

Both before and after May, we should aim to draw in other activists such as militant unionists, solidarity

activists, and community activists. We should also seek to attract new affiliates such as ethnic left groups, Left Press in Brisbane, other independent groups of leftists etc and, despite their hostility, Socialist Alternative and the Socialist Party.

In a sense, it is a bit like the European Union—we need to both deepen and broaden the Alliance through increasing our joint work and programmatic agreement and through attracting new activists.

Socialist Alliance has established an important body of common experience. If we can show the labour movement that the revolutionary left can work together and start to attract a wider range of forces, we can make a serious contribution to building a mass class struggle workers' party. ■

INTERVENTIONS

War on terror, or war on civil liberties?

By Lisa Macdonald (Parramatta branch)

[Talk to a Socialist Alliance public meeting in Sydney on December 3, 2002. Lisa Macdonald is the lead candidate for the Socialist Alliance Legislative Council ticket in the May 24, 2003 NSW state election.]

If, just a couple of years ago, someone had warned that Australia was soon to become a police-state—a place in which children could have guns held to their heads, anyone over 10 years old could be strip searched, and citizens could be detained for days on end without charge or access to a lawyer of their choice—it is unlikely that many would have believed them. In fact, they probably would have been accused of being conspiracy theorists.

Yet that is exactly what has happened, stunningly quickly, since September 11 last year.

When the state power denies such fundamental human rights as equality before the law and freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention; when ministerial powers are extended into operational policing—that is, when there is no longer a separation of powers; and when police are immune from prosecution and police powers are exempt from challenge by the courts, it can be described as nothing but a police-state.

The new “anti-terror” laws being introduced at both federal and state levels that other speakers have described are probably the most sweeping attack on democratic rights in Australia’s history. The last targets of such repression—Communist Party members and sympathisers during the Cold War 1950s—have been multiplied into *all* those who dissent from Australian governments’ war-mongering, racist, pro-corporate anti-worker and socially divisive policies.

The history of secret service and state Special Branch activity in Australia shows that the sorts of police powers that are being handed out by Liberal and Labor alike are always abused, and always used against left and progressive movements, organisations and individuals.

The definition of a “terrorist act” in both the federal and NSW legislation is extremely broad and convoluted precisely because its targets are those things it purports to exclude: “advocacy, protest, dissent or industrial action”. Every conceivable actual terrorist act—bombing, kidnapping, hijacking, murder, wide-scale destruction of property, etc.—is illegal and has been for many years. The new police powers only make sense when you understand that they are intended, not to prevent or punish terrorist acts, but to intimidate activists and scare the mass of the population into submission and conformity; that is, to silence critics and protest.

Socialist Alliance was directly involved in a small but telling local example, which occurred even before this legislation is passed.

Bankstown branch of Socialist Alliance and the local anti-war group organised a protest rally in Bankstown’s Old Town Plaza on November 16 calling for no

war on Iraq and condemning the racist attacks on Muslim and Arab people. That was the Saturday after the anti-WTO protests in Sydney, which prompted police minister Mick “Mussolini” Costa to ban all marches in Sydney and attempt to shut down the Sydney and Melbourne-based Indymedia web sites.

The local police had been advised of the Bankstown rally two weeks in advance. The day before the rally, the police began ringing rally speakers to tell them the protest was illegal. One community representative was rung three times that afternoon.

At 9.30 on the night before the action, police turned up at the home of protest organiser and Socialist Alliance local candidate Sam Wainwright and hand-delivered a letter saying the action was unauthorised.

Thanks to the refusal of most of the speakers to be intimidated—many of them from the Arab and Muslim communities—the rally went ahead, but so did the state harassment. Tactical Response Group police attended and a plainclothed police officer openly filmed everybody present.

The state can confidently carry out such operations, and others such as the far more serious ASIO raids on local Indonesian Muslims homes last month, in a context in which the public is being fed a solid diet of what John Pilger calls “xeno-racism” by the establishment media.

The escalating physical and verbal abuse of Muslims and people of Middle Eastern background, the attacks on Mosques, and so on, have not been a spontaneous and automatic reaction to the terrorist attacks. They have been consciously and deliberately fuelled by politicians and the media—by the tabloid scare campaign about terrorists targeting the Olympics or the Harbour Bridge, by David Oldfield’s call to end the immigration of all Muslims to Australia, by Fred Nile’s call to ban Muslim women from wearing the *chador*, by government leaders’ calls for people to “be vigilant and keep an eye out for suspicious behaviour”, followed almost immediately by radio shock-jocks broadcasting calls for each “Australian” to “monitor a Muslim”.

The vilification of Middle Eastern people as “natural-born terrorists” has been so widespread that it is not unusual to hear young men walking down the main street of Auburn—the suburb in which I live and which has a large Middle Eastern background population—greet each other with the words, “Giddy you terrorist!” They do it with a grin on their face, but the humour is very black in a context where the state and federal governments are cementing anti-Arab prejudice into law.

Both John Howard and Bob Carr have relied heavily on racist scapegoating during their terms of office. This scapegoating serves a particularly clear purpose for the major parties at present because governments do not win domestic support for oppressive wars over-

seas through rational argument and presentation of facts. They ultimately rely on the dehumanisation and demonisation of the supposed enemy.

So, xeno-racism was used to justify the “collateral damage” of the war on Afghanistan, in which more civilians were killed than in the attack on the World Trade Centre. And how else could the decade-long blockade of Iraq, which has caused an estimated 1.6 million civilian deaths, have been “justified” without the racist idea that a Middle Eastern person, an Arab, is worth much less than a white westerner?

Now the same ideas are being used to justify the impending war on Iraq—and indeed all future wars against Third World countries in the US-led drive by the imperialist countries to control the world economy and political terrain.

But this is not an easy job for them. Most Australians still aren’t convinced that a war on Iraq is necessary, or that Iraq has anything to do with al Qaeda. The polls tell us that, but even more importantly, the large anti-war demonstrations around the country over the last few weeks show that tens of thousands of people are prepared to take action to stop that war.

Nor, I am sure, are the majority of people—if only they were asked—convinced that they must give up many basic democratic rights in the name of “safeguarding” Australia from terrorists. There is a reason why the NSW Labor Party rushed their terror bill through parliament so quickly—they fear public opposition and the prospect of a broadly supported campaign against it.

So while the NSW terror laws were passed with bipartisan support in parliament tonight, whether or not they can be applied *carte blanche*, whether or not they serve their purpose of deepening racism and dividing the community, and whether or not they can be overturned, is still an open question. And the answer will depend in large part on us.

Most of us in this room would argue that to stop terrorism, all people everywhere must have justice, security and a decent standard of living. We’d agree that the hatred of oppression and struggles for freedom that in large part spawn terrorism cannot be coerced or legislated out of existence.

No war on Iraq!

By Vanessa Hearman (Wills branch)

[Speech delivered to the December 1 Melbourne rally against the threatened war against Iraq.]

I’m speaking today from Action in Solidarity with Asia and the Pacific (ASAP), as well as representing Socialist Alliance.

My task here today is to put the Bali bombing into perspective, as well as to talk about an alternative to war.

The Bali Bombing was a terrible tragedy, resulting in loss of life for Indonesians, Australians and those of other nations. But does it justify war? Does it justify state-sanctioned racism? Does it justify terror raids into our homes and cars? Does it justify resumption of military ties with the butchers of Jakarta?

We urgently need to take that understanding out into our schools, workplaces, campuses, communities and streets with the aim of delegitimising these laws, ensuring that they cannot be used because there would be a huge public outcry against any such action.

In the short term, we must make the issue of civil liberties a key election campaign issue in NSW—make NSW Labor pay a huge political price for their assault on democratic rights.

That means organising solidarity with the main targets of the laws—the Middle Eastern background and Muslim communities.

It means recognising that these laws cannot be reformed: the whole aim of the legislation is to create wide and arbitrary police powers, permanently and you cannot reform such an aim.

It means getting the trade unions on board—they too are targets of these laws.

It means encouraging the remaining decent rank-and-file Labor Party members, who must be horrified by what is happening, to leave that party of terror and join a broad united front to campaign for the defence, and extension, of civil liberties.

The ultimate goal must be to get these laws repealed. Even if they are not systematically implemented, for so long as they are on the books they are a serious threat to democracy.

Of course, the new legislation ensures that taking such a stand is going to require commitment and courage: under the new NSW legislation, even simple non-cooperation with police efforts to implement their new powers can result in a two-year jail sentence. Simply failing to identify yourself when asked can land you in jail for a year.

But, it’s been done before and we can do it again. The Menzies government’s move to ban the Communist Party in 1951, for example, was defeated by a united campaign of unionists, political activists, churches and Labor Party members.

We urgently need such a campaign today, and most definitely the Socialist Alliance will throw themselves into building it. We call on all of you to join us.

Since 1965, Australia has been one of the key backers of the Indonesian regime, who strangled democracy for so long and laid waste to any form of opposition. It was also the same generals in Jakarta, who, in their political manoeuvres and to discredit the opposition, set up all kinds of shadowy organisations, like the militias we saw in East Timor and Laskar Jihad, a supposedly fundamentalist organisation which disbanded just hours before the Bali bombs exploded.

This is the same Indonesian military and police, whose credibility our government is working so hard to restore. Indonesia now has come under the same anti-terror laws, as what is being proposed here in Australia.

But our brothers and sisters in Bali and the rest of Indonesia reject this return to the more repressive days of the past.

Regional stability cannot be brought about through more repression, cannot be bought by bullets and guns and the stranglehold of the International Monetary Fund. We have to fight alongside the pro-democracy movement in Indonesia against the militarist policies of Canberra and Jakarta.

I am also here representing Socialist Alliance, we stood 5 candidates in the Victorian election [on 30 November 2002] on a clear platform of opposition to war—whether carried out unilaterally by the US or with UN agreement. We also made publicising this rally a key part of our campaigning activities.

As socialists, we know this war is about US he-

gemony and US control of oil. The talk of “failed states”, US re-establishment of military presence such as in the Philippines all smack of that “I” word (that “I” word doesn’t refer to “I, George W. Bush rule the world)—that “I” word is imperialism.

We reject war and call for Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian Occupied Territories, for the US to stop its bombing raids against Iraq—lift the sanctions! Peace will only come to the Middle East and the rest of the world, when the majority of working people are in control of their destiny. When the millions, not the millionaires decide how to allocate society’s resources for the benefit of all.

No war in Iraq, no war anywhere!

DISCUSSION

Left unity

Socialist Alliance is a united front not a vehicle for revolutionary regroupment

By Alison Thorne (*Freedom Socialist Party*)

[Alison Thorne is member of the National Executive of Socialist Alliance and is the Coordinator of the International Executive Committee of the Freedom Socialist Party.]

Socialist Alliance is important! Together we are boldly promoting a fresh socialist alternative to worn out social democracy. The thin gloss of social justice which once helped disguise the ALP's pro-capitalist agenda has long since peeled off. Exposed for all to see is a bunch of electoral opportunists with a neoliberal agenda.

The Greens are currently achieving growing success in their bid to win disaffected Labor voters. They oppose war, stick up for refugees, advocate increased social spending and raise the alarm about environmental destruction. It is hardly surprising they look an attractive option to many disgruntled voters. But read the fine print. The Greens stand squarely for capitalism. In a world driven by the market, taking care of people and the planet is a luxury this system will not tolerate. The immense problems faced by humanity at the start of the 21st century cannot be solved through promoting a kinder, fairer green capitalism.

In this climate, Socialist Alliance has a crucial role to play as an unambiguous socialist pole of attraction. By uniting eight socialist organisations—from distinct political tendencies—and many hundreds of socialist minded individuals we are maximising our ability to be heard as an uncompromising voice for socialist ideas in a world where neo-liberalism dominates.

Every affiliate and every member of Socialist Alliance should feel proud of what we have collectively achieved in less than two years. Now that we have gained electoral registration Federally and in several states, we have the opportunity to test the real potential of Socialist Alliance as an electoral united front. We have also proved that we can unite in action around broader objectives: defence of trade union and democratic rights, opposition to war and organising to deepen working class support for refugee rights. The Freedom Socialist Party (FSP) looks forward to continuing this important work within the framework of Socialist Alliance.

We're also keen to test our collective ability to build caucuses within the trade union movement to challenge the deadening legacy of the Accord years. Socialist Alliance could make a real difference by creating more democratic space within unions and strengthening militant unionism. We also have a key role to play promoting discussion of broader social issues within unions. Our aspiration is for Socialist Alliance to become a real poll of attraction as the loud, proud voice of socialism in many unions, including

unions the FSP is already actively working in such as the Community and Public Sector Union.

Socialist Alliance has an excellent track record of championing the fight against racism. Socialist Alliance explains how the ruling class fans xenophobia and bigotry with the clear aim of diverting working people from recognising that the capitalist system itself is the source of poverty and unemployment. This is in sharp contrast to the gutless ALP—which panders to the most backward layers within the working class.

FSP advocates that Socialist Alliance expand its exemplary anti-racist educational role to include actively fighting sexism and homophobia. These central questions have so far been tacked on—rather than integrated into—the work of the Alliance.

Socialist Alliance has bold women and queer activists within its ranks, many who play a leading role. Four out of the five top-notch Socialist Alliance candidates in the recent Victorian State elections were women. And, in the last Federal election, Socialist Alliance in Victoria proudly boasted a bigger percentage of queer-identified candidates than any other party. The task now faced by the Alliance is to emulate its anti-racist efforts by advocating feminist ideas and their importance to the entire working class.

We could start by asking Socialist Alliance in each city to launch a campaign, organise a protest or hold an event for International Women's Day. For example, we could campaign around the popular demand for paid maternity leave with protests outside peak employer bodies demanding that the bosses be made to pay for maternity leave.

The FSP believes the reason that the demands of working women tend to appear as an afterthought is that some Socialist Alliance activists hold a narrow view of the working class in the twenty-first century. If we combine women, queers, immigrants, people of colour, people with disabilities and Indigenous Australians we are talking about the working class majority. Let's build a Socialist Alliance which truly reflects the modern working class.

Of the hundreds of people who joined Socialist Alliance during recent registration campaigns, many want Socialist Alliance to be on the ballot and to provide leadership in the movements, in their workplaces and on the streets. They're fed up with the constant stream of privatisation, cuts to welfare, attacks on unions and destruction of the environment which are dished up by Liberal and Labor alike.

The task of Socialist Alliance activists right now is to invite these members to become more involved. Let's work together to create vibrant and robust Socialist Alliance branches. These branches need to be

democratic, welcome diversity and be places where socialists of every stripe can maintain their distinct viewpoints. The critical cement that will hold them together is a desire to resist the myriad of attacks on the working class in all its diversity and a passion to promote socialism.

We think the Socialist Alliance project has already laid great foundations. It is of vital significance for working class politics in Australia and is not something which any of the affiliates or individual members can be allowed to jeopardise.

Don't wreck it! Don't quit it!

Because of the immense value we place on what the Socialist Alliance has achieved in less than two years, we are concerned about the possible outcome of current discussions about the future of the Socialist Alliance.

The proposal made by Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) earlier this year to cease building itself and to operate as a tendency within Socialist Alliance risked tearing the Alliance apart.

Why?

Because it was a destabilising tactic which pressured other affiliates, including the International Socialist Organisation (ISO)—which publicly acknowledged internal differences about its orientation towards Socialist Alliance—to respond to the DSP's agenda and timeline.

Quite frankly, the DSP's timing for launching the discussion about the future of Socialist Alliance stunk. At the very time when the Alliance should have been focusing all of its efforts outwards by campaigning in the Victorian election and towards the March New South Wales election, a vigorous internal discussion was launched which sapped energy from the very activity which inspired so many individuals to join up to Socialist Alliance in the first place.

We welcome the recent decision by the DSP to withdraw its forced march time line for operating purely as a tendency within Socialist Alliance, but remain critical of the political fuzziness of its general orientation which remains on the table minus the original timeline. From the DSP's internal documents, it appears that in the medium term, the DSP aims to transform Socialist Alliance into a coherent and disciplined revolutionary party. How this is to be accomplished—given the wide variety of passionately held political ideas within Socialist Alliance—is far from clear.

The future of the Alliance is also threatened by the impact that the discussion is having on internal differences within the ISO about the value of Socialist Alliance. The DSP's proposal may well end up as a convenient excuse for those ISO members opposed to the Alliance to force it out of the Alliance. This would also damage the Alliance, perhaps fatally. The DSP has a clear view about the future of the Socialist Alliance—don't wreck it, don't quit it! Strengthen it!

We advocate building Socialist Alliance as a principled united front which welcomes diversity. Its purpose is to popularise socialism through vigorous electoral campaigns and through joint campaigning work in

specific agreed areas, based on a shared political perspective.

False debate

Under the name of Alliance co-convenor, Dick Nichols, the DSP has put forward a proposed "vision statement" for Socialist Alliance, presumably to be debated at the May 2003 national conference. This statement somewhat cryptically proposes that Socialist Alliance somehow transform itself into a revolutionary mass party at that conference, thereby becoming that principle vehicle for left regroupment in Australia.

This is simply not a question that the May conference should be considering.

Is there anyone currently active in Socialist Alliance who considers that, short of a making a revolution, we can reverse privatisation, end discrimination, deliver land rights to Indigenous people, save the environment, open the borders, end war, plus fully fund health, education, transport and housing? Not that we've come across. But certainly many inactive members have not necessarily reached this conclusion.

But that's the beauty of using transitional demands. This method—used by Socialist Alliance—was developed by Leon Trotsky in the Transitional Program. The DSP's sister organisation, Radical Women also uses this approach. In the Radical Women Manifesto it is explained this way: "the Trotskyist concept of transitional demands—demands which arise from everyday necessity and cry out for solution ... can never be fully realised under capitalism—and for this reason they expose the rotting system."

It follows from this method that within Socialist Alliance revolutionaries must support and lead fights for even the most minimal reforms, because in so doing we will mobilise inactive and unfinancial members and truly transform it.

Conductors on public transport, abolition of HECS, reduced child care fees, access to welfare for new arrivals, shorter working hours, increased funding for women's refuges, abolition of the parental income test for Youth Allowance, equal superannuation rights for queer couples, the implementation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: these are day to day survival necessities.

In the current economic period—where capitalism has clearly reached its imperialist stage—reforms are increasingly difficult to win and the day-to-day struggles of working people have taken on an increasingly defensive character. But this makes the fight for reforms even more important. The struggle around reforms is a struggle over easily identifiable, mutually exclusive interests. Working people drawn into such a fight soon grasp the enormity of the project and the nature of the vested interests they confront. The fight for reforms is a conduit to radicalisation: very simple demands can take on a transitional character and open the gateway to revolutionary consciousness.

Socialist Alliance fights for reforms but is not a reformist organisation. Nor does it require people wishing to join to identify as revolutionaries. Given the united front nature of Socialist Alliance, this is how it should be in this period and for the foreseeable future.

We will activate the hundreds of people who joined Socialist Alliance because of a passionate desire to see the Alliance get electoral registration by putting aside the diversionary debate around revolutionary regroupment and mobilising around the real question of building and expanding the united front. Phoning members to help us get on with the job of making an impact during upcoming State and municipal elections, organising socialist caucuses within unions, marching in the Pride March, celebrating International Women's Day and defending Indonesian people being targeted under Howard's anti-terror laws are all concrete ways to do this.

On left regroupment

FSP most emphatically considers that regroupment of the revolutionary left is important. But Socialist Alliance is just not the means by which it can occur. Part of our founding platform is to actively explore the opportunity for revolutionary regroupment, a process where socialists from different political tendencies hammer out political ideas to explore if there is sufficient political agreement to join together into one coherent revolutionary organisation.

The Freedom Socialist Party has a Trotskyist and feminist program. Trotskyist because we agree with the methods and politics of the key leader of the Russian revolutionary struggle. Feminist because we consider that the demands and leadership of women are crucial to all working class struggle, from immediate reforms to socialist revolution. We were formed in 1966 after a long, often bitter political struggle around important questions of principle, such as the need to consider and act on the demands of the most oppressed people, not just relatively privileged white male workers in unionised industries; such as the importance of building revolutionary organisations in the capitalist heartlands—the United States, Europe and Australia—as

well as in “developing” countries. The history of this and nature of this struggle is detailed in *Crisis and Leadership*, recently republished by Red Letter Press, and available through FSP in Melbourne.

We have defended our policy through nearly forty years not because of stubbornness, nor of sectarianism, but because of considered, sincerely held, principled positions on the condition of the working class and the ways in which global socialism can be achieved. What reasonable person could seriously expect us to ditch our history in favour of a lowest-common-denominator “multi-tendency party?”

One of the most important achievements of the Alliance is a sharp lessening in sectarianism amongst the members of affiliate organisations. It is easier to acknowledge that different political programs are the result of long lasting, sincerely held positions.

The fact remains, however, that the differences are real, long lasting and involve fundamental issues about the struggle for socialism. They cannot be wished away, nor somehow glossed over. They have to be argued out so that any merger of left groupings is based on a solid, principled political foundation.

For this reason, FSP is strongly of the view that, while seeking opportunities for real regroupment, we will also continue to build our own organisation. We do not see this as detracting in any way from continuing to contribute to the building of a stronger Socialist Alliance as a united front with current affiliates and individual members. We warmly welcome any affiliate or any individual member within the Socialist Alliance who would like to find out more about revolutionary feminism to get in touch with us. If you like what we stand for, then join. Work as a member of the Freedom Socialist Party to advance our vision—building a vibrant, democratic, diverse Socialist Alliance.■

What next for the Socialist Alliance?

By Shane Hopkinson (Rockhampton branch)

It is tremendous to see such a vigorous debate and discussion about the future of a Socialist Alliance in Australia. Part of this process requires that we consider the experience of building a socialist alternative in Australia. Recently I read an article by Boris Frankel (1997) “Beyond Labourism and Socialism” (*New Left Review* No 221) where he notes that while the British Labour party underwent “modernisation” in the face of a terrible defeat, which might make even the hardened militants more inclined to be pragmatic, such was not the case in Australia. The defeat of the ALP in March 1996 brought to a end the longest continuous period in recent decades in which the trade union movement had a central role in national socio-economic policy. While attacked by the Right, a plethora of left tendencies and socio-cultural organisations also tried to shape ALP policy either via unions or other social movements. In the midst of this the ALP was captured by the radical (and pragmatic) pro-market policy makers and leaders. The socialist left faction in the ALP was large and

(with the Communist Party of Australia) controlled key unions in manufacturing, mining, building, transport, energy and communications. The working class had suffered no decisive defeat—indeed the transport workers strike against the wage freeze was the nail in the coffin of the 1975-83 Fraser Liberal government. One would have thought that things could not have been better for socialists in the ALP to lead us on a better road and yet the right faction centred on Hawke/Keating were able to pave the way for neo-liberalism.

Frankel argues that accommodation to capitalist culture began with Gough Whitlam who in the late 1960s removed the labourist overtones of “party of the working class” to talk of “employees”. In the late 1970s an internal debate on the “socialist objective” watered down the ALPs commitment to nationalisation—commitments that had ceased to be part of electoral programs since the early 1960s. Hawke took power in 1983 on a wave of enormous popularity and set about

achieving a populist consensus with the Accord, which was the basis for the shift to a pragmatic neo-liberalism, which was why it was supported by the Right faction.

From what I understand the Socialist Left attempted to use the Accord between the ACTU and ALP as a vehicle for strategic or “political unionism” as a basis for the transition from capitalism to socialism. Brian Howe, parliamentary leader of the Socialist Left (and later deputy Prime Minister) couched his strategy in socialist terms. Frankel points out that it was difficult to see a clear international model of socialist strategy in 1970s and 1980s, especially in the face of well-funded think-tanks and corporate media promoting neo-liberalism. The Accord, the left argued, offered the best opportunity to implement a national industry policy, boost the social wage, for workers to effect some kinds of workplace democracy and lay the basis a new political unionism: instead they ended up trying to manage capitalism.

Given that the outcome—decline in real wages, undermining of shop stewards’ networks and the triumph of neo-liberalism—it is clear that there is a massive ideological problem for rebuilding a serious socialist movement and that this problem exists on a global scale. My purpose in writing this is to raise the question of those who went through these experiences. What lessons should be drawn from this? What should they have done differently? Perhaps instead of waiting to get 51 per cent of seats at the ALP conference they should have broken with the ALP when they could had 35-40 per cent of conference with them. How could it have been worse?

It is also recently become clearer to me that well before the collapse of the USSR, the CPA had no clear vision for the socialist project, which I always assumed was the result of the collapse. Apparently the shift to the right in the ALP was made ideologically possible because the CPA transformed itself into a powerful political force campaigning against any kind of socialist project in the labour movement. And so the left (with some noble exceptions) supported the Accord. The DSP and Socialist Party of Australia (SPA, now Communist Party of Australia) were opposed to it though and tried to unite around this but it seems incredible that the ALP socialist left with all its resources and the CPA with all its experience could capitulate so badly to neoliberalism, almost without a fight, and from a position of strength. I think it would be great to analyse this experience as a prerequisite to moving forward.

It would be useful I think to analyse the experience of the CPA, not to settle historical scores but as part of

the debate about the way forward for a new socialist project.

More concretely, this would help clarify the differences between the International Socialist Organisation and Democratic Socialist Party on the issue of the ALP and labourism—which is in the process of working itself out in the Socialist Alliance. Most recently Carmen Lawrence’s resignation from the front bench over the ALP’s failure to adopt a progressive position on refugees raises the differences between the ISO and DSP on the role of ALP groups like Labor for Refugees. I think the whole “Labor For Refugees” (L4R) section of the movement requires some detailed analysis since it brings to a focus the issue of how socialists should relate to the Labor Party. It highlights a key difference in the Alliance partners over strategy. The ISO has, I understand, in general been more sympathetic to L4R while the DSP remains more skeptical. Whatever stance one adopts to the ALP, given our real weight in these things, it seems to me that her resignation is a good thing and a sign of the levels of dissent that exists with the ALP ranks. The question then is: “What stance should the Socialist Alliance adopt to this development?”

Of course there are other issues that need to be debated but it is crucial that the Socialist Alliance thinks through the issue of how best to orient to mass organisations like the ALP and the Greens so as to get the best hearing for socialist ideas and how to put them forward as a program of action. I’m not sure we have the resources to produce a newspaper but a monthly broadsheet as part of the website and mailed out to members—along with the various tendency papers—might be a good start. Also if there was enough interest we could base a discussion list on the Socialist Alliance website that would facilitate these discussions.

No one should underestimate the task we face—historically low levels of class consciousness and since the 1982-83 recession working class confidence is low. Those shaped by the 1960s have lived through a historical downturn in struggle without precedent, in length, in the history of the movement since 1848—three generations depoliticised. The 1989-92 fall of Berlin Wall and collapse of the USSR (and the CPA) disoriented the left and attempts to set up a new left party failed (though the Greens are now starting to capitalise on this) and, despite widespread discontent and unemployment, neo-liberalism is triumphant. Socialists are regarded as “exotic utopians” if they know we exist at all. The issues we face are broader than the ALP question and I certainly don’t have all the answers but at the moment I am still trying to figure about what the right questions are and my organisation, the DSP is, as always, trying to figure out what to do *next*. ■

The Socialist Alliance and left regroupment

By John Tully (Socialist Democracy)

[This contribution is the text of a speech given to the Socialist Alliance’s December 11 Melbourne public meeting on building the socialist movement today.]

A. The formation of Socialist Alliance was perhaps the most significant step forwards for the left in decades. I thought that at the beginning of the process and still think it now, so my remarks should be seen in that

context. Also, nothing I have to say should be construed as a personal criticism of anyone who worked in our recent election campaign.

There can be no doubt that Socialist Alliance fell victim to the “Green Steamroller” on November 30. Socialist Alliance didn’t exist at the time of the last state elections, but a cursory glance shows that the vote for the hard left was down drastically—Steve Jolly’s vote in Richmond, for instance, was down by almost 10 per cent, and our vote in Northcote was a fraction of that achieved earlier by the Progressive Labour Party (PLP). We are really going to have to come to terms with the Green phenomenon.

However, we shouldn’t let this short-term situation obscure the long term picture. The fact is that components of Socialist Alliance have been standing in parliamentary elections since the mid-1970s—I myself first stood as an SWP candidate in 1975. Even taking into account last month’s Green steamroller, it must be said that we haven’t advanced in terms of votes over the best part of thirty years.

This fact highlights the extreme isolation of the hard left from the working class and the social movements. In fact, we fared no better on November 30 than the LaRouchite maddies of the Citizens Electoral Councils (CEC). They got 0.33 per cent of the lower house vote and we got 0.11 per cent, although they stood in more seats than we did.

I think we would all agree that we have to break out of this isolation. The question is how and we have to do some hard thinking about that. Otherwise we will be condemned to an endless re-run of the “myth of Sisyphus”—pushing a rock up hill with terrific effort, only to have it roll back down again. Australians have an earthier metaphor—pushing shit up hill.

All of this raises the question of why we stand in parliamentary elections. Some people answer that we don’t stand in the hope of being elected, that it doesn’t matter what vote we get, that we only stand to raise issues.

I cannot agree with this position and I also believe that they point to a big disagreement about what Socialist Alliance itself is, or should be. I’ll come back to that point.

I have to insist that size does matter in this context. We have to approach elections as if we want to win them and we should not be content with anything less than a respectable vote. Otherwise, why bother? All the “answers” I raised earlier—that we only stand to raise issues, that we aren’t concerned with the size of our vote—smack either of the consolation of the perennial loser or of the self-deluded inwards-looking mentality of the sect.

I am not advocating that we abandon our commitment to socialism. However, I do think we need to have a big think about how we pitch ourselves. Socialists have been elected to parliaments and councils in this country. Only a few, it is true. They include Percy Brookfield—that’s going back a bit—and Fred Paterson. Nick Origlass and Issy Wyner were elected to the Leichhardt Council, Jack Munday to the Sydney Council. A few others, such as George Petersen, have been elected on the ALP ticket. Overseas, hard-left

candidates have been elected to parliament in a number of countries, most strikingly Brazil. But even in the English-speaking world, we have seen Joe Higgins elected to the Irish Dail and Tommy Sheridan and others elected in Scotland.

By and large, these candidates were elected because they spoke to the electors in language they could understand, and campaigned on issues that the electors saw as immediately relevant to their needs and aspirations. Fred Paterson was a real tribune of the people in his constituency of cane cutters and wharves. Origlass and Wyner were genuine local leaders in Balmain. Joe Higgins, of the Committee for a Workers’ International’s Irish section, was a respected campaigner against water rates and privatisation. Jack Munday is in a class of his own, but he campaigned on the kind of green urban conservation issues he had pioneered in the NSW Builders Labourers Federation.

All of these socialists campaigned like they wanted to get elected. They didn’t stand just to “raise issues”. We should take it as a given that it would be a good thing to get people elected—not out of any illusion in bourgeois parliaments—but so that we could use parliaments as national and state platforms for socialist ideas, and, as with the old Militant MPs in Britain, with the idea of acting in a role something like that of “shop stewards” for working class electorates.

Our starting point should be the consciousness of those we want to vote for us, our method should be transitional. I have to ask, therefore, why was it that we campaigned primarily on federal issues in a state campaign?

Yes, I know there is no Chinese Wall between the two, and I’m also aware of Marx’s thoughts on what he called the categorical imperative of supporting the most oppressed. So by all means, we should have raised the “federal” issues in a general way, in our general propaganda, in the context of broad statements about capitalist globalisation and the war drive. I think that by and large we neglected the other issues.

Note that the Greens didn’t concentrate on federal issues. This doesn’t mean that they ignored them—Pamela Curr continued to campaign for the rights of refugees, for instance—but they also drew their votes away from established parties because they had clear policies for the state election. We didn’t have policies. We had a series of slogans. I must say that it seems to me that the PLP had it all over Socialist Alliance in this respect. So did Joe Higgins in Dublin and Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow.

Part of this was, to be sure, a lack of money, personnel and resources on our part. But it was more than that. We should have gone in hard against Bracks, not just against Howard. The ALP takes the votes of inner city, working class electorates for granted, especially in the western suburbs. We should have bashed the tripe out of them for the way they have neglected the working class and the poor. Places like Footscray have more poverty, more unemployment, more drug and alcohol abuse, more despair, more factory closures, worse education, welfare and public transport etc than elsewhere. People die much earlier than they do elsewhere in this city. We have more trucks spewing out diesel their

carcinogenic fumes than anywhere in Australia. We have Coode Island and any other toxic dump that voters in swinging seats would never tolerate. Yet these seats have been “Labor” strongholds for over a century.

Whatever happened to the 35 hour week? We mentioned privatisation, but it was down the list and we didn’t mention Compulsory Competitive Tendering at all, or the refusal of the Bracks Government to restore the public holidays stolen by Kennett—remember, too, that there was a strike of council workers just before the election on this very issue. We did spend a lot of time discussing such issues at our first national conference, but they got pushed to one side, largely.

D. This leads me next to the type of organisation Socialist Alliance should be. I am flatly opposed to it being merely a reorganisation of the revolutionary deckchairs, or merely the agglomeration of most of the existing revolutionary left. If that’s all it is—and this is why I am worried about the ramifications of the DSP’s proposal—then we will have failed. The fact of the matter is that the overwhelming majority of people breaking from Labor will not come directly to revolutionary socialist politics. To quote Shakespeare: “I can call spirits from the vasty deep, but will they come when I do call?” We need an umbrella organisation that those people can feel comfortable in, where they will not be pressed about doctrinal questions of reform and revolution, but also where Marxists can operate. When comrades say that we will recruit in ones and twos, well, I’m afraid I reject that kind of dismal political arithmetic. In my experience the minuses outweigh the plusses.

To sum this up, the PLP got it right in many ways. The problem was that they had the wrong personnel.

E. We also have to come up with a better orientation to the Greens. We should not forget, by the way, that the modern “green” movement originated in the workers’ movement as a result of the pioneering work of the NSW BLF. Petra Kelly came out to Australia and took the term back with her to Germany. The ecological movement as a whole owes a very large debt to the Australian labour movement of which we are a part.

Going back to the issue of the Green Party. Firstly, we have to realize that the Greens are not a homogeneous force. They are a broad coalition that encompasses three main currents: the “Blue-Greens”, the “Green-Greens” and the “Red-Greens”. That is not meant to be a definite taxonomy. There are overlaps, but it is a good working classification. By Blue-Greens I mean people who are basically small-l liberal types. The Green-Greens are solely concerned with conservation issues and might be quite conservative, possibly even right-wing on some social issues. Lastly the Red-Greens are those concerned with the social dimension. Many of them see themselves quite consciously as socialists. They are our natural allies.

Some people say glibly that the Greens are our rivals. On one level, this is self-defeating claptrap. We

are no rivals to the Greens. Let’s keep a sense of proportion. The Greens got 282,237 votes, or 9.73 per cent of all votes cast in the lower house on November 3. We got 3271, or 0.11 per cent—in a much smaller number of seats, of course, but the point still holds. If we had proportional representation, the Greens would have a number of seats in parliament. (I’d like to flag that issue for future discussion).

We are rivals in a limited way only in the sense that we are competing for similar constituencies. But then, I would argue that precisely because of this—because we do agree on some fundamental things—and all the more so with the Greens left, that we should see them as potential allies. They aren’t going to go away. They are on a roll and it is pointless to speculate that if they get into government they will automatically be “exposed” and people will turn to us. It hasn’t happened in Tasmania, and the Greens have been there for a long time. It is also self-defeating claptrap to say they aren’t “real” activists. Again, this strikes me as solace for perennial losers. In fact, the Greens have many respected activists such as Pamela Curr in the refugee movement, and in my local area Michele Finey and Janet Rice on trucks and other environmental issues. And what is Bob Brown if he isn’t an activist?

In the past, the PLP negotiated a “non aggression pact” with the Greens—this was via Gurm Sekhom, who has no compunction about calling himself a Red-Green, incidentally, and who is an elected local government councillor. Yet when I raised the idea on the Socialist Alliance NE of trying to get a similar agreement with the Greens, there was general indifference, although one comrade did call it “madness”. Well, if that’s madness, I’m positively barking! I also think, that it was perhaps not the best idea to stand against someone like Pamela Curr—no matter how fine an activist Judy McVey is. Similarly, I’m not sure it was such a great idea to stand an Socialist Alliance candidate against a left candidate like Peter Wilson in the recent Cunningham by-election in NSW. Perhaps Socialist Alliance could have endorsed Wilson in the name of left unity?

There are no easy solutions. No magic bullets. J.K. Galbraith said that there are only two certainties in life: death and taxes. I think we’d have to add, hard work. I’d argue that we need to develop ongoing activity in the electorates where we have branches. A follow-up letterboxing expedition to say thank you, as the bare minimum, but also longer-term campaigns on a variety of “levels” of issues, even further letterboxing of Socialist Alliance material. We also need a “war chest” so that we aren’t always caught on the hop, reacting with scant resources whenever a maggot-headed politician such as Steve Bracks decides to call an election. Basically, it’s about implanting ourselves in the working class in local areas, but with a national spread. We have to build real links with the working class communities if we are to succeed. ■

Fighting war and racism: how do we build the socialist movement today?

By Margarita Windisch (Democratic Socialist Party)

[This contribution is the text of a speech given to the Socialist Alliance's December 11 Melbourne public meeting on building the socialist movement today.]

Imperialist war drive and racism

The September 11, 2001 World Trade Centre attack provided the imperialist ruling class with a welcome shot in the arm for a new offensive on a mass scale. This attempt by western imperialism to build a new "American Century" is only possible through launching a terrorist war on the Third World which has already led to thousands of lives lost in Afghanistan. A war in Iraq will make the Bali bombing look like child's play.

Connected to the "war on terrorism" overseas is the war on Arabs and Muslims at home. A campaign led by the Howard government, the Australian Labor Party leaders and the corporate media which has made racist outpourings acceptable, normalised xenophobia and raised the anti-Muslim hysteria to new heights. The shocking ASIO raids on Muslim homes and "Vile" Nile's comments about Muslim women are but one example in a litany of vilification.

Anti-war resistance

At the same time we have also witnessed and are part of a worldwide movement that is actively resisting this intensified war drive. Huge marches against war — Washington, Rome, Florence ("taking the cake" with one million), London and in Australia ranging from 10-40 thousand. And this before the war against Iraq has even started!

The links between the mobilisations against war and the anti-corporate movement have become increasingly obvious. The rally in Florence initiated by and following the European Social Forum meeting, confirms for us today that the cutting edge of anti-globalisation is a fight against imperialism and war. Imperialist governments and their armies have taken the mantle back from the transnational companies as the number one enemies for working people and the oppressed.

This is a progression in the development of the anti-globalisation movement. Even in Melbourne last year the "O3" anti-corporate demonstration [against the Commonwealth Business Forum] was transformed into a vibrant and militant rally against the US war in Afghanistan

This shows that there is a massive potential out there in the community, which we can organise and draw into the socialist movement. However, not everyone who radicalises against war and racism will take on an anti-systemic consciousness. Certainly the most left sections of the movement are "anti-capitalist", but many are merely fighting a symptom, and have yet to be won to the idea that capitalism is the cause.

Tasks for Socialists and the Greens

The challenge for us is how as socialists to relate most effectively to this layer. How do we draw the increasing number of people who are won to opposing war into the campaign for socialism?

In answering this question we can not avoid having a discussion about the Greens. We can confidently suggest that the rise of the Greens is a gain for us all. It signifies a clear shift to the left of the ALP. The Greens have replaced the Democrats—people want an alternative, not a watchdog—as the third force in politics.

The Greens victory will raise hopes for people that the Liberal-Labor stranglehold on parliamentary politics can be seriously challenged. This is a much needed booster for politics generally and the left specifically in Australia, giving people the confidence and enthusiasm which is needed to fight for change.

The huge vote for the Greens in the state election was a vote against war, as much as it was a vote against the logging of native forests. Through their parliamentary and media profile and their large campaign, the Greens have scooped the pool of the left of Labor sentiment in Victoria and elsewhere. At a conservative estimate there are hundreds of thousands of people who are prepared to abandon the Labor Party and vote for the Greens—precisely because they believe in the anti-war, pro-refugee vision that the Greens are putting forward.

So how do we as socialists relate to this development? It would be a huge mistake for us as Socialist Alliance to ignore the vote for the Greens. Certainly there were a considerable number of socialist voters who voted Green in this election—hoping to give the Greens a boost. But there are the layers of Green voters as well who could be won to socialist politics.

Socialist Alliance and the elections

Since our successful registrations and initiatives, the Alliance has become a recognised participant on the political landscape here in Victoria but also more generally in Australia.

Federal Trade Minister Mark Vaile named the Socialist Alliance as one of the reasons they couldn't announce the venue for the World Trade Organisation's meeting of ministers in advance. The Victorian Peace Network in Victoria, however reluctantly, agreed to have a Socialist Alliance speaker on the platform of the 15,000-strong December 1 anti-war rally. This is a significant step forward for socialists. As the Alliance we do have the credibility, which the individual affiliate organisations could never muster.

Our 1 to 2.7 per cent election result has been very respectable in the face of the massive Green rise and was higher than anticipated. This two per cent average was a clear vote for socialism. Socialist Alliance also won more first preference votes per Lower House seat contested than the Australian Democrats.

Our result shows there is important space for socialist candidates. The socialist left has a duty to maintain its active presence in electoral politics, campaigning for the most important prerequisite to defeat conservatives—the need to rebuild and democratise working-class organisations from the ground up

But we also know that the Liberal-Labor agenda cannot be defeated simply by bumping a few good people into parliament. Socialist Alliance’s role in uniting many of the progressive movements activists and strengthen this layer is at least as important as the Greens winning more seats in elections in the short to medium term.

On polling day we had 200 people out there campaigning against the war! This kills the argument of some sectarian sections on the left who suggest the Alliance’s election campaign detracted from us building the anti-war movement (never mind our letterboxing efforts!).

And as socialist candidates we expressed clear anti-capitalist sentiments. Our campaign highlighted that the best policies on paper mean nothing in the context of capitalism and that only a radical restructure of society along socialist principles can actually deliver.

Our socialist stance was made very clear in our election material where we made an argument for socialism—another indication of the level of agreement within and for the Alliance. Candidates in various launches were not afraid to use the “s” word (for example, Judy [McVey] in Brunswick when she said that “we need to fight to bring down capitalism”).

So as the Democratic Socialist Party we do not advocate that Socialist Alliance abandon electoral politics. The Victorian campaign was professional and managed to mobilise many independents. This election shows us that there is a solid base of support for socialist politics, particularly united socialist politics. We believe that we can build on this result. Comrades interstate have gained confidence from the Victorian experience and are gearing up for the NSW elections in March.

However, the DSP is also aware that we will not be able to increase our initial results mainly electorally; we will be eclipsed time and time again by the Greens. Obviously, we should continue to stand Socialist Alliance candidates. It is important to continue to use the forum of elections to raise socialist politics. Yet we think that the work should go further.

We are convinced that the lesson of almost two years of the left working together in the Alliance is that there is more that unites us than that divides us. We believe that there is a high level of consensus that has been developed in Socialist Alliance—both among affiliates and independents, and that we should build on that unity.

The election was but one fantastic example of this unity: we made it very clear that the Alliance is explicitly anti-war and will campaign vigorously against it. Our brilliant anti-war contingent on Decemebr 1 was another testimony to our joint work where the Alliance showed a vibrant and unified face to the anti-war constituency.

Agreement on more Socialist Alliance joint work

We agree with the ISO in their projections that the Alliance should do more industrial work. And in practice the Alliance has already taken that on board

Some of the most instructive examples are Alliance comrades intervening into the NTEU conference as a caucus, a range of leaflets with clear politics distributed at various trade union rallies (like those in support of CFMEU Victorian state secretary Martin Kingham and against Grocon’s proposed Enterprise Bargaining Agreement). Workers now notice us being there and respond favorably to us—we are not alien anymore (as a result we had some MUA and AMWU members help out on polling day). The Alliance also pulled off a very successful trade union solidarity forum in Victoria.

The Socialist Alliance’s role in intervening in union struggles is crucial especially in the context of the Bracks’ government’s reneging on industrial manslaughter legislation, an intensifying attack on the CFMEU through the Royal Commission, the AMWU’s campaign 2003 as well as some unclear divisions within the progressive unions (e.g. Martin Kingham’s attack on Victorian Trades Hall Council secretary Leigh Hubbard in *The Age*).

The DSP also agrees that the Alliance should raise its profile in the campaign against the anti-terror laws, and in all demonstrations. But this is not enough; a few placards and banners at demonstrations will look good but will not give us more weight or help our growth if that’s pretty much all that we offer.

We feel that the potential for unity is much stronger than that and should take on organisational forms; initially under the banner of a class struggle program for socialism in a multi-tendency socialist party.

We are committed to a greater unity through Socialist Alliance—a unity born from collaboration and joint work. However we do not suggest that this in itself is political clarification and we do *not* conflate the two. We do not deny that differences exist. However, political clarification can develop from greater organisational unity over time.

The DSP has participated in and listened to the discussion and we are prepared to slow down the process at the behest of the other affiliates. Although we seek an Alliance with its own publication and offices, we are willing to withdraw our proposals regarding Resistance Centres and access to *Green Left Weekly* for the time being—in the interest of keeping the Alliance together.

We thoroughly endorse a longer period of greater collaboration and joint work even though this maintains the existing burden of affiliates building two organisations.

The Alliance and newspapers

Many members have raised the call for a Socialist Alliance regular publication or its own paper. Now this would be a step forward for the Alliance but it is not something on the table currently. If and until the Alliance has its own paper we are for the right of all affiliates to campaign with their own papers. We can’t fool

people that Socialist Alliance is not backed by socialist organisations. Hiding our identity will only lead to misconceptions

Unity needs to be treasured

Many “non-affiliated” members of the Alliance want the left to unite—that’s why they have joined the Alliance and not the affiliates. And they are not naïve and can recognise differences but are also aware that some of differences can be elevated to obstacles to unity and are frankly abstract. They say: let’s test it out in practice.

Socialist Alliance is not a fishing pond for the affiliate organisations. It has a right to its own existence and to develop with and through its own potential. That is precisely why so many people joined it—because it is an alliance that brings all progressives together. Now more than ever—with the imperialist onslaught on the way—people are looking towards solutions and are more and more receptive to socialist politics.

The catch cry of the anti-globalisation movement is “another world is possible”. And really there is a sense of urgency in this. Our role is to make this vision of “another world that is possible” real and achievable. This can only be done by making the Alliance *real* and putting it on the centre stage of progressive politics today. We will only be able to intervene effectively and win leadership of campaigns by demonstrating in prac-

tice that we have the best politics and are organised to take on the challenge the ruling class is throwing in front of us. Then many more anti-capitalists will want to join us over the Greens.

So now we have a couple of choices—we either relegate the Alliance to the scrap heap of history, overtaken by the pace of events and forces to the right of us or we take up the challenge and help lead the way in creating this new world.

And let’s not forge—the ruling class fears nothing more than a strong united left!

I want to end by quoting comrade Raul Bassi (from Argentina and Socialist Alliance member in Sydney):

“Back in Argentina, my experience was that every time we were dodging the army’s bullets, escaping persecution or fighting in the streets, neither the bullets nor the army ever asked me or those next to me, what differences we had about building socialism. They were trying to stop us from fighting together against the system”.

Comrades, the working class, who we are part of and for whom we all profess to fight, crave unity. Not merely occasional unity, around occasional campaigns, but a real unity, a unified party with one unified publication, which can advance the cause of socialism here and everywhere.” ■

The Cunningham by-election

1. Where did Labor’s preferences come from?

By Chris Williams (Illawarra branch)

In response to comrade Anne Picot’s contribution “Lessons of the Cunningham by-election” (*Discussion Bulletin* Volume 2, Number 6, December 2002, p. 10), I wish to raise a few points. The substantial vote for Peter Wilson (trade union-backed independent) was undoubtedly significant. It reflected the electorate’s deep disillusionment with the Labor Party, and proved that more and more people are willing to abandon Labor once they see a “credible” alternative presented, even in Labor heartland. Combined, Wilson and the Greens polled around 35 per cent of the primary vote, a huge swing away from Labor in one of their historically safe seats.

The ALP are averaging a massive swing against them in every election. It seems that people are abandoning Labor for good, not wavering. In the Cunningham by-election, I think it’s obvious that Labor won the conservative vote and lost masses of their traditional voters to the Greens and Wilson.

The question of where the preferences to the ALP came from is an important one, as they lifted Labor’s vote from 38 to 48 per cent two-party preferred. However, Anne’s assertion that they were likely to have come from Wilson is actually wrong (see graph over based on Australian Electoral Commission data)¹.

In fact, 52 per cent of preferences received by the ALP from other candidates came from David Moulds (Liberal Party member running as an Independent), the leading right wing independent. This is the very trend Anne considered unlikely. Another nine per cent came from One Nation voters, so the ALP really mopped up the racist vote on preferences. Twenty four per cent of preferences to the ALP did come from Wilson voters, but this against over 61 per cent coming from the right. The rest (15 per cent) mainly came from the Democrats and the Christian Democrats (Fred Nile’s party).

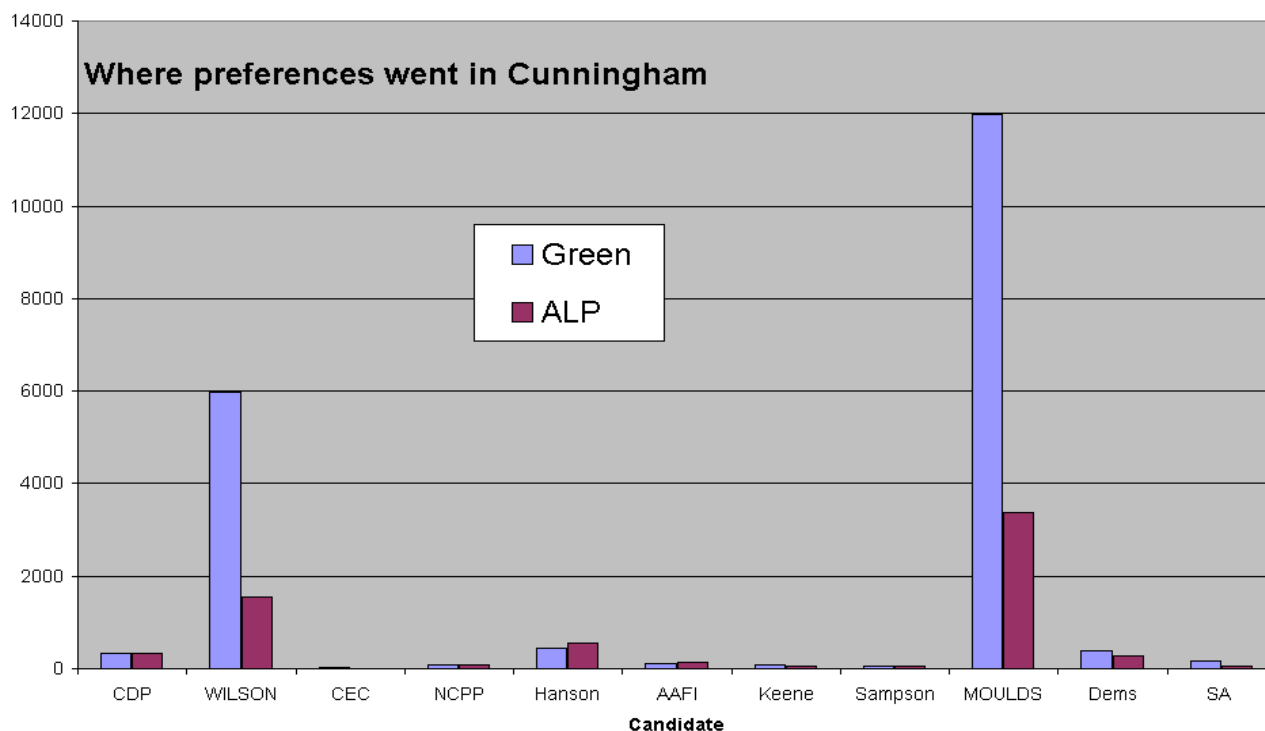
Overwhelmingly, most voters preferred the Greens over Labor—even 80 per cent of Moulds’ preferences went to the Greens. I think this represents the Liberal voters who wanted to punish Labor (the major aim of Moulds campaign, other than getting elected). The 20 per cent going to Labor from Moulds (over 3000 voters, 52 per cent of preferences flowing to Labor) represents, I think traditional conservative voters who didn’t want to see the Greens winning the seat. While all other candidates called on their supporters to preference the Greens ahead of Labor, but the only voters that mainly went the other way were One Nation and Australians Against Further Immigration supporters—two of the most reactionary candidates.

In terms of the Wilson voters, 80 per cent of his preferences went straight to the Greens, indicating where his support base stands on the ALP.

¹ Full data is available from the Socialist Alliance national office [editor’s note].

I agree with Anne that it will take more than a glossy program and enthusiastic supporters on polling day to persuade Labor supporters to desert their party. But the ALP itself is doing the job for us, and are showing no signs of changing course. I think Cunningham highlights the state of decay that the ALP is in,

and just how prepared traditional ALP supporters are to jump ship when they perceive a genuine alternative to be presented. Obviously, the challenge of the Socialist Alliance is to convince these people that we are part of that alternative. ■



Preference flows to Greens and the ALP

<i>From</i>	<i>To Greens</i>		<i>To ALP</i>	
	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>%</i>
Christian Democratic Party	339	2%	327	5%
Peter Wilson ("community independent")	5973	30%	1552	24%
Citizens Electoral Council	22	0%	13	0%
Non-Custodial Parents Party	78	0%	85	1%
One Nation	448	2%	566	9%
Australians Against Further Immigration	112	1%	143	2%
James Keene (Independent)	88	0%	47	1%
Meg Sampson (Independent, ex Democrat)	57	0%	63	1%
David Moulds (Independent, Liberal))	11982	61%	3366	52%
Australian Democrats	379	2%	290	4%
Socialist Alliance	157	1%	42	1%
Totals	19635	100%	6494	100%

2. The Socialist Alliance campaign: a reply to Riki Lane

By Chris Pickering and Chris Williams (Illawarra branch)

Comrade Riki Lane's contribution to the *Discussion Bulletin* (Volume 2 Number 6) states that the Illawarra Socialist Alliance made several mistakes in the Cunningham by-election campaign, particularly the manner in which we directed our preferences; that is, putting the Greens before South Coast Labour Council-backed candidate Peter Wilson and then putting the Democrats ahead of the Australian Labor Party (ALP).

He goes on to say that our approach represented a "class-free" analysis, concentrating upon the various candidates' attitudes to issues such as the war drive, and that because the majority of our branch are in the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) we in Illawarra Socialist Alliance view the ALP as just another capitalist party, thus having no problem preferencing the Democrats before the ALP. He believes that we failed in relation to Wilson because we saw Wilson's union base as being less important than his policy inadequacies compared to the Greens.

Comrade Riki suggests that Illawarra Socialist Alliance will not be successful in laying down roots in the organised working class if we "keep orienting mainly to activists in the movements and campaigns". In addition he states that "we should adopt a firm policy of always directing preferences to the ALP before any outright capitalist parties", implying that the ALP is not an outright capitalist party.

We believe that class struggle politics encompasses much more than just the trade unions, although admittedly they are of great importance, and in relation to the ALP the authors of this contribution certainly believe that it clearly is "an outright capitalist party". But Riki is mistaken in his assumption that the Illawarra Socialist Alliance branch has ignored the growing discontent of workers with the ALP and that we have not attempted to connect with this milieu.

The Illawarra Socialist Alliance

Firstly a point of clarification—there are just as many members of Illawarra Socialist Alliance who are not DSP members as there are those who are members of the DSP, although admittedly the majority of active members of the branch are also DSP members.

The political context of the Cunningham by-election

With neo-liberalism on the rampage against working people, the major parties are facing a continuing decline in electoral support. At the last general election the combined vote for Labor and the coalition was the lowest for 60 years. Contributing to this is the fact that there is less and less differentiating the major parties. They are both implementing a similar bi-partisan agenda supporting the whittling away of education, health and welfare, and they both support war and detention of refugees and, thus, racist scapegoating.

In the Illawarra the backlash is mainly against Labor since they have ruled here for so many decades. The federal seat of Cunningham has never been held by anyone else, being an ALP stronghold since its creation in 1949.

The largely industrial city of Wollongong has a long and proud history of trade union and working-class solidarity, being a traditional stronghold of the ALP left and the Communist Party of Australia. It was at Port Kembla that workers initiated the struggle against "Pig Iron Bob" Menzies' trade with Japan's war machine in the late 1930s, which at that time was rampaging through China, and it was in the Illawarra's coal mines that miners held out longest during the 1949 coal strike. These historical realities have meant that the Liberal Party was never going to stand a chance of success in this seat.

However, another more interesting phenomenon has begun to emerge in recent years—the ALP has been consistently losing support. For example, during the last federal election, in the seat of Throsby, Jennie George suffered the biggest swing against any ALP held seat in the country, and Stephen Martin copped a six per cent swing against him in Cunningham. Martin had held Cunningham for 18 years and it was one of the safest ALP seats in the country. The November 2001 election saw Martin forced to preferences, thus failing to gain an absolute majority in the primary vote for the first time during his tenure.

Many factors have contributed to the progressive erosion of the ALP's support in Cunningham. These include:

- ALP bipartisan support for Bush's war and Ruddock's treatment of refugees. Martin was the ALP's shadow defence minister and a very vocal advocate for a coast guard to "safeguard the borders";
- NSW ALP attacks on workers' compensation;
- ALP support for the Sandon Point development in the northern Illawarra. Sandon Point is not just about development as it also involves the question of indigenous rights, the natural environment and the preservation of local heritage;
- ALP support for Port Kembla Copper, and contempt for the Port Kembla community who are desperately fighting against this corporate polluter;
- The ALP's role on Wollongong City Council, most notably ex-lord mayor (and now ex-ALP) George Harrison who was forced to resign under a cloud of scandal;
- Internal ALP corruption, branch stacking and the notorious "N40" rule (N40: the clause in ALP rules which allows Head Office to do without branch-based preselection); and
- The ALP's general pro-development, pro-corporate outlook.

The anger at Labor continued to intensify after the November Federal elections, with George Harrison resigning as lord mayor and then Stephen Martin resigning from parliament just nine months into his term. Many were outraged at the ALP for costing the taxpayers two expensive by-elections. In the lord mayoral poll, the ALP suffered a humiliating defeat, losing the position for the first time in over a decade. Their “sacrificial lamb” candidate Bob Proudfoot mustered a disappointing vote, while conservative independent Alex Darling cruised home. The big news though was the massive 14 per cent vote for Greens candidate, Michael Organ. Organ, previously with the Active Community Team (a northern suburbs resident movement) polled very well across the whole of Wollongong. Particularly ominous for the ALP was the fact that he won entire booths in the northern suburbs such as Bulli, Thirroul and Austinmer, directly reflecting the Sandon Point issue. The letters pages of the *Illawarra Mercury* and *Wollongong Advertiser* were by now very much “bash Labor” forums, with angry letters every day. News stories of branch stacking and internal seediness were coming out all the time.

Things only got worse when Sharon Bird from the ALP Right was “N40ed” into the seat of Cunningham. During the 2001 preselection for the seat of Throsby, Jennie George was also “N40ed” in, ousting local hopeful Sharon Bird herself, who publicly denounced the N40 rule. Her hypocrisy (or short memory) backfired on Bird. The electorate was outraged when she was installed in Cunningham, riding in on the back of the undemocratic rule she had previously railed against. She also became the punching bag for the burgeoning local ALP faction fight as she changed factions from “Left” to “Right” in order to secure the Cunningham preselection.

These internal ALP shenanigans, extensively covered in the local print and electronic media, fuelled the general public’s cynicism with the ALP. The ALP was patently suffering a creeping public relations disaster as, on top of its actual politics, it was increasingly being exposed as undemocratic, corrupt and careerist.

Meanwhile, Sussex Street (ALP head office) was also threatening to oust Col Markham, who holds the state seat of Wollongong. Markham, a former coal miner who has a lot of working class political “cred” in the region, is the only ALP-Left state MP still in office in the Illawarra. The progressive loss of most of the region’s seats to the ALP Right is the central cause of the bloody factional warfare that we see here in the Illawarra.

The Wilson candidacy and relating to the discontent with Labor

Comrade Riki is correct to say that the “Socialist Alliance needs to relate effectively to the growing discontent with the ALP by workers” and that connecting with those backing Peter Wilson’s campaign was, and is, of importance. We acknowledge this because this has been our general approach as factional tensions have heightened in the ALP and the unions in our region, particularly throughout 2002.

For example, Chris Pickering, who is one of the Public Service Association (PSA) delegates to the South Coast Labour Council attended several meetings of the Wollongong Labour Forum grouping of disgruntled left union representatives that met several times in early to mid 2002. This grouping was basically set up to wage internal ALP factional warfare, being very much a peak body and thus not involving rank-and-file ALP members. The central leadership of the grouping comprised the heads of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, Australian Workers Union, Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and other left unions.

It announced after its third and final meeting in July this year that—owing to the fact that Col Markham was being threatened with disendorsement via the imposition of an ALP head office preferred right-wing candidate under the N40 rule—a public meeting would be called in the Wollongong Town Hall to consult with the public in general and with various community-based organisations. Markham would also be toured across selected worksites throughout the Illawarra.

The Forum also indicated that it would run independent candidates against the ALP in next year’s state election and would back Markham as an independent if he were ousted. The local Socialist Alliance branch was looking forward to the opportunity to relate to the base of the ALP and its supporters: they would undoubtedly come to the public meeting and we were considering the appropriate tactics to employ. Unfortunately it turned out that the union bureaucrats’ public rhetoric was aimed purely at putting pressure on the ALP Right — the events “coincidentally” took place just before the ALP state conference. Not surprisingly the public meeting and workplace tours never materialised.

The main players involved in the Wollongong Labour Forum were the initiators of the push to run a candidate against the ALP Right in the Cunningham by-election. The election campaign was a further extension of the same process. A PSA organiser involved in the process explained to us that the intention was to “fire a shot across the bow of the ALP Right”. In the light of these facts one can see that the Wilson campaign represented a particularly brutal and cannibalistic form of factional warfare that resulted in the actual loss of the seat.

The point that should be obvious here is that we in the Illawarra have not remained politically aloof to what is happening within the ALP. In 1987, for instance, when NSW Trotskyist ALP parliamentarian George Petersen led a section of the region’s ALP members (including some prominent trade unionists) out of the party and set up the short-lived Illawarra Workers Party, we joined it and were very active in building Petersen’s election campaign in the following year.

Should Socialist Alliance have withdrawn its candidacy?

Labour Council President and Teachers Federation organiser Peter Wilson’s candidacy actually came too late for Illawarra Socialist Alliance to consider with-

drawing from standing in the by-election. No official public announcement was made by his camp that he was intending to stand until the day before nominations closed. If Illawarra Socialist Alliance had known about his candidacy we would most definitely have sought out Peter Wilson to discuss joint work and the potential for a joint ticket.

However, even in this hypothetical situation we would still almost certainly have wanted to fly the socialist flag in this by-election, especially after having worked so hard to gain electoral registration in New South Wales. Illawarra Socialist Alliance needed to test the level of electoral support for our politics and take advantage of the opportunity to popularise socialist politics. In the right circumstances, after weighing up the pros and cons, Socialist Alliance definitely should carry out joint electoral work with other progressive political forces such as the Wilson camp or the Greens, but we should only do that if we can be confident of contributing to a real left-moving dynamic and not at the expense of becoming invisible as a distinct socialist current.

We would also need to be sure of getting a real chance to work with and talk to the ALP, trade union and/or Green activist base that we really need to relate to. In short, such opportunities for left united front electoral work would need to provide us with some form of real political gain and our contribution as Socialist Alliance would have to be specifically recognised as such by the other left forces involved in the united front (by the leadership and the ranks). Otherwise we would be seen as just another couple of dozen campaign workers.

(As an aside, it should be noted that on election day comrades reported that they had plenty of opportunities to talk to rank-and-file members of the Wilson election campaign, especially Teachers Federation activists, and our separate Socialist Alliance candidacy was no obstacle to dialogue, whether Wilson's booth workers were ALP members or not.)

Political "cross-over" on the left in the Illawarra

We would also note that the politics and membership of the Greens cannot be easily pigeon-holed as "petty bourgeois". Trade union and community activists in the Illawarra sometimes cross-over in terms of the groups that they are active within. The northern suburbs Active Community Team which started out about twenty years ago, is a residents' action movement, itself historically related to and affected by the strong past presence of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) in that part of the Illawarra region. Activists from the Active Community Team, in the past and now, have been involved in the local trade union movement; some have been delegates to the South Coast Labour Council and have also taken part in campaigning for the Illawarra Greens. Michael Organ, the Greens candidate is himself a member of the Active Community Team, and is also a PSA delegate at the University of Wollongong.

There is "cross-over" in other areas too. For example, the secretary of the Illawarra Greens, Jenny Kosch,

recently left the ALP and has been a prominent Teachers Federation delegate to the South Coast Labour Council for many years. It is certain that many activists here had close political connections to both Wilson and Greens camps and it is also certain that some were doing political campaigning for both groupings. Thus, it is plainly incorrect to draw black-and-white political conclusions that the Wilson camp represented the working class while the Greens by definition did not and could not because they have no organised relationship to the class.

The politics of preferencing

Most members of Illawarra Socialist Alliance branch would consider themselves Marxists and as such we most definitely do apply a class analysis to politics, including in our approach to preferencing. We would consider that preferencing is a tactical question, which involves weighing up multiple political considerations that reflect the myriad of ways in which class politics manifests itself in the real world. On the other hand, comrade Riki's suggestion that the Socialist Alliance should "always direct preferences to the ALP before any outright capitalist parties, including the Democrats" indicates that he believes that a tactic should be elevated to the level of a principle, and hence that we should adopt a permanent preferencing strategy.

Before addressing Riki's argument it is important to pay attention to the fact that the Socialist Alliance branches themselves form the basic political units of our organisation. They must retain sufficient political autonomy not only to make realistic and objective political judgements on the ground, but also in order to be able to act upon these assessments by having the democratic right to decide preference selection. In short, we should remember that the Socialist Alliance constitution gives local branches complete autonomy over preferencing decisions for lower house seats.

Socialist Alliance branches involved directly in the politics of their region have an intimate connection to, and knowledge of, what is occurring on the ground. Furthermore it is a fact that the various branches of Socialist Alliance do have a different political flavour, which reflects the mix of the particular affiliated and non-affiliated members of specific branches. As a result the exact manner in which the Socialist Alliance approach is applied in each branch will sometimes differ slightly.

We see no problem with Socialist Alliance developing a general national policy direction or suggestion in relation to preferencing, but to centralise and set in concrete important tactical choices that by their essence require some form of flexibility would simply rob Socialist Alliance branches of a political tool that they need to have at their disposal.

However, in relation to preferencing, how does one actually apply a class-based analysis anyway?

It is obvious that the process is more complex than saying that "candidate A = the working class", "candidate B = the petty bourgeoisie" or "candidate C = the bourgeoisie". There are many issues worth considering when deciding upon how to rank various candidates.

The following points would seem to warrant consideration:

The program/platform/policies of the party, organisation or candidate;

- What they say they would do if given the chance;
- What they actually have done when given the opportunity in the past; i.e. the history of the party/organisation or candidate (e.g. as a government or as a member of parliament or parliamentary grouping or in terms of campaigning on concrete issues);
- How they actually respond to the major political issues of the day;
- The characteristic politics and social class/strata of the political organisation's leadership;
- The characteristic politics and social class/strata of the membership of the political organisation;
- The major sources of financial support that the organisation enjoys;
- The major political issues impinging upon mass consciousness within the electorate at the time;
- The general political mood or mass sentiment within the electorate in which the candidates are standing; and, most importantly,
- What concrete issues need to be addressed for a socialist candidate to get a hearing from the working class and other oppressed layers.

This constellation of factors is also subject to something that sounds unscientific but is a very real political factor—the intangible element of being able to get the political “feel” for what is happening on the ground in a certain place at a certain time.

All these facets make up the overall class-based analysis that is required to effectively and correctly exercise preference ranking when socialists participate in electoral activity.

The Greens versus Peter Wilson

We now want to focus on the specifics of our actual campaign and how the Illawarra branch made its concrete preferencing decisions in the Cunningham by-election.

As previously explained, the by-election was taking place in the midst of a massive build up of anti-ALP sentiment. Within this context we had three left-of-Labor candidates running, so in what order should we preference?

As everyone is well aware, we wanted to make Cunningham a referendum on war and detention of refugees, so the other candidates' positions on these issues were very important to us. We also considered as crucial the issues of advancing left unity and ensuring Socialist Alliance got a hearing from the electorate and community in general.

Our initial discussion was around whether to preference the Greens or Peter Wilson first. At that stage the Greens had a superior position on the war, publicly opposing any war on Iraq, with or without UN backing (although they later came out with a leaflet opposing a

“US-led war on Iraq” after our preferences had already been decided upon and made public).

At this initial stage Wilson's comrades and his propaganda leaflet were only opposing a “unilateral attack on Iraq”, leaving support for a UN-led war open. On refugees Wilson *said absolutely nothing* while the Greens advocated a “more humane and compassionate” treatment of detainees. Organ stated publicly clear opposition to mandatory detention but neither he nor Wilson were saying very much on the subject; the issue obviously being seen as an electoral liability. Even so, the Greens were clearly better on this count.

In our first discussion with the Greens (after all nominations were known), convener Ian Miles indicated to us that the Greens wanted to preference Peter Wilson first, then Socialist Alliance. They had already done a deal with Wilson to swap first preferences to ensure maximum flow away from Labor. In our first discussion with the Wilson camp, their campaign manager told us that they would be preferencing the Greens first, the Democrats second, then conservative independent Meg Sampson (ex-Democrat), then Socialist Alliance. The ALP was way down their list.

Wilson's propaganda never got beyond Laborite politics. In addition we recognised that, on paper, Green party policy in general is clearly to the left and the Greens are attracting many, especially young people, who are moving to the left. With the Greens holding a consistently firm line against much of the neo-liberal agenda in various state and federal houses of parliament, the proposition that Wilson's “true Labor” politics should be in-principle preferred before the Greens really seems to be a misreading of the current state of play in Australian politics.

These things combined convinced us that we should preference the Greens first and Peter Wilson second. Later, in response to left pressure from Socialist Alliance, Wilson moved to the left on the war question, stating publicly that his camp was unequivocally opposed to any war on Iraq regardless of UN support.

The Democrats versus the ALP

The second discussion was around whether to preference the Democrats next or the ALP. We clarified that we shouldn't have an “in principle” approach to this question but should assess the specific situation. On the questions of war and refugees, the Democrats were superior both in policies and in action, even though there is always a certain opportunism in “leftward” shifts that they make.

ALP candidate Sharon Bird preferred to remain very silent over the issue of the impending war. When quizzed, she spewed out the Crean line word for word. The Democrats on the other hand were quite public about their opposition to war, even running a TV advertisement in opposition to it. Their eventual how-to-votes card stated “war is not the way to peace” and much of their propaganda stated opposition to war on Iraq. So while their actual position on paper was not much better than the ALP's, they actively and publicly opposed the war during the campaign. On refugees the Democrats were clearly better than the ALP.

On industrial relations the Democrats have an outrageous track record. Amongst other things their support for Reith's "second wave" legislation is something that cannot be forgotten. But we decided that while the Democrats are awful on this issue, they are no worse than the ALP. This will be controversial, but we took several factors into account, the NSW ALP's attacks on workers' compensation being a very important one. (Then of course, who could forget the ALP smashing of the BLF and the pilots and their current implicit support for Abbott's campaign against the militant Victorian trade unions. There was also Carr's racist law-and-order campaign and Brack's S11 performance.)

The sticking point was the GST, which the Democrats should be condemned for supporting. However, the ALP on this question is now hardly much better, having ditched its previous public stance of even "rolling back" the GST.

In the end we decided to go with the Democrats based on all the above factors but also because it would assist in getting the Socialist Alliance a hearing amongst working people and others in the Illawarra. Socialist Alliance members not resident in the Illawarra need to appreciate that there was an intense general mood which could be characterised as "throw Labor out". Letters columns in the local print media and the content of general conversations were literally saturated with sentiment involving typical phrases like; "they have deserted us", "Labor has taken us for granted" or "Labor has betrayed its traditional supporters". With Wilson being seen as a "true Labor" alternative, the pressure was on to put Labor last or as low as possible.

With the Liberals not running against the ALP, the major battle between left and right was seen to be between the Greens and Labor. All candidates preferred away from Labor, and both the other left candidates (Greens and Wilson) put the Democrats before Labor on their how-to-votes. When comrade Riki states that "we only distance ourselves from working class militants if we give any credence to the Democrats as an alternative to the ALP" he completely misreads the political climate in the Illawarra in the present period.

On the contrary, we believe that Riki's position is actually quite conservative and out of kilter with the sentiment of a good chunk of the Cunningham electorate, because he underestimates the extent of the ALP's political exposure. In the end we are confident that preferencing the Democrats over Labor was the right decision to make. Locally, we have not received one negative response to the way we preferenced. In fact we believe that if we had put the ALP third on our list we would have been subject to quite a few puzzled inquiries!

Those comrades who staffed booths on the day would know the mood against Labor, with many voters going straight to the Greens or Wilson campaigners and angrily rejecting the ALP staffer. Many local ALP members handed out for Peter Wilson and were happy to put the ALP last when it was their turn to vote. We know that the ALP had to import 80 members from Canberra alone to cover the booths. We were told by an ALP insider that Thirroul branch of the ALP (in the

northern suburbs) donated one dollar to the Bird campaign! One ALP member refused to hand out for Labor, and photocopied hundreds of our leaflets to assist us! There are many stories like this. The anger at Labor was intense.

Obviously the question of the Democrats is different to the Greens as its dominant wing does represent a distinct class-based petty-bourgeois politics and there is no shift of leftward moving voters to the Democrats. However, that said, if we were to apply comrade Riki's formula of always preferencing them after the ALP then how would we deal with the following hypothetical scenario? Imagine a federal ALP government which is even more rightwing than the last and wants to push through legislation to further attack refugees, amongst other reactionary measures. If the Democrats had control of the Senate and were continually forcing ALP reactionary bills to be amended or ameliorated in some manner, would we want to preference the ALP before the Democrats? Would we want to in-principle preference the ALP before them because the ALP supposedly represents the working class in some roundabout manner?

As revolutionaries we need to campaign to break people's illusions in Labor, not reinforce them. In the current political phase in this country this is our key task. The ALP along with the Liberal and National Parties represent the two wings of the neo-liberal assault in Australia. Seen correctly in this context it is clear that the ALP is a reactionary pillar of stable capitalist politics, and can be nothing but a never-ending political dead-end for those genuine working class militants who are trapped within its suffocating embrace. (Moreover, take a look at the Australian Electoral Commission's website and study the financial contributions to registered political parties section and see the massive contributions the ALP receives from big business.)

Our final preference slate

These was one last discussion in Illawarra Socialist Alliance regarding preferences, involving One Nation. Should we put them last on principle? We decided that we should preference from left to right, so we put the three basically ultra-right candidates below One Nation.

Below are Socialist Alliance's preferences, Cunningham 2002

1. Chris Williams, Socialist Alliance
2. Michael Organ, The Greens
3. Peter Wilson, Independent
4. Linda Chapman, Australian Democrats
5. Sharon Bird, Australian Labor Party
6. James Keene, Independent
7. Meg Sampson, Independent
8. David Moulds, Independent
9. Owen Nannelli, Christian Democratic Party
10. Geoff Crocker, One Nation
11. John Flanagan, Non-Custodial Parents Party
12. David Hughes, Australians Against Further Immigration
13. Hal Johnson, Citizens Electoral Council

Trade unions versus movements: a false dichotomy

On a final note, comrade Riki argues that “we cannot keep orienting mainly to activists in the movements and campaigns’. We would suggest that this position could be labelled a “class-free analysis’. This position ignores the fact that workers are not just workers when they physically go to work. Workers take part in political movements and campaigns and always have done so, outside of the structures of the organised working class and sometimes within them. Political movements and campaigns do not take place in a class vacuum and many movements and campaigns have a very direct connection to the class struggle.

When masses of politicised workers, many of whom are members of trade unions, involve themselves in political movements and campaigns does this occur outside of the class struggle? The answer is clearly in the negative. Comrade Riki seems to suggest a false dichotomy — we must work mainly in the un-

ions and not in movements and campaigns. We would argue that the fight for socialism involves struggle on varying terrains amongst and alongside various social and political forces. The socialism that we are fighting for in the 21st century must take up issues that extend beyond direct economic and “point of production” issues and therefore must relate to important questions such as the environment and other movements striving for human liberation.

The motor force in overthrowing capitalism and replacing it with a system that will allow us to proceed to the next phase of human social development — socialism — will always be the working class. The manner in which the working class will struggle will vary widely, and in the future may take forms which we cannot yet even imagine. ■

Refugee rights

Implications of change in government policy for the refugee movement

By Carlene Wilson (Wills branch)

The announcement in early December that the Coalition government was making changes to its mandatory detention policy has serious implications for the movement for refugee rights.

The announcement comes at a time when the ALP are also discussing changes to their own policy.

The important changes are that unaccompanied minors will be released into foster care and that women with children will be given the choice of living in supervised housing, similar to the trial that has been occurring in Woomera.

It will be some months before the housing has been built at Woomera and Port Augusta but the decision will affect some 170 women and children currently in high security detention.

Obviously this change answers the criticisms of those who have pointed out the terrible psychological affects on children in particular, of lengthy detention. But it is, as the Liberals themselves point out, only a tweaking of the current policy. It doesn’t change the pacific Solution, it doesn’t change the actual policy of mandatory detention and it does nothing for the men who will be left in the concentration camps.

For the refugee rights movement the policy change may pose a problem. Where will groups like Chilout (whose focus is children in detention) now go? Will they remain opposed to government policy? The same

goes for the small “I” liberal side of the movement. Now that the policy appears a little more humane, will they still be fighting for change?

It is important that the movement acknowledges two things.

The first is that this is a victory, albeit a small and partial one. Ruddock has been intransigent. He has had to adjust policy because of the pressure put on him by huge protests and by the affect these have had on the public policies of both the ALP and the Greens. Dissent has just been too much and it seems reasonable that the Liberals hope this small sop will dull the protests in the next period.

The second thing is that as a movement we must now redouble our efforts to oppose mandatory detention full-stop. The changes in policy will make life a bit easier for some refugees. But the housing scheme is not freedom for those women and children. And there are huge issues involved with the trauma caused by separating families—women and children separated from adult male relatives.

This new policy highlights why it has been important to oppose all forms of detention—including the open reception centers advocated by the Greens. This is the direction the movement must now take up fully if it is to maintain the momentum of this small victory. ■

Some thoughts on building the Socialist Alliance in the North of Sydney

By John Gauci (Sydney Northside branch)

There is great potential for growth in the North of Sydney. We have organised numerous successful events and rallies over the past 18 months.

First there was our very successful refugee action outside Kirribilli House earlier this year, which drew in broad layers of people and organisations and gained much media attention.

Then came our successful “The People vs Phillip Ruddock” public meeting” in Manly. Two hundred people attended. We established relations with a wide range of groups including Greens, Democrats, Chilout as well as prominent local activists Trish Hindmarsh and Peter McDonald. We received great press in the *Manly Daily*, including a front page article and many new contacts.

We have also organised numerous successful screenings of Pilger films. We screened “Killing the Children of Iraq” and “Breaking the Silence”. This drew in many contacts, we received local press including two 30 minute radio interviews with Northside Socialist Alliance member Michael Morphet. The screenings raised over \$300 for our election campaign.

We have also organised a number of successful events in the Chatswood, where we also gained coverage in the local paper, made contact with a number of new people and joined a new person at our recent candidate launch. We organised a recent Chatswood public meeting on “The War in Iraq”. The guest speaker was Hannah Middleton, and we attracted some more new faces.

Last month we boldly defied Manly Council’s total ban on political rallies in the Manly area by initiating the November 23 “No War in Iraq rally” in the Manly Corso. This type of activity is unheard of in the Manly area.

Even though we were the main organisers of the rally, we worked with progressive Manly councillor Brad Peterson (aka “Godfrey Bigot”) as well as the Greens and Democrats. We attempted to gain a permit for our rally by calling it a “Rally for Peace and Tolerance” and the Manly Council did everything in its power to prevent us. They ended up rejecting our rally application because of public liability insurance. We went ahead with our rally despite council threats to close us down and fine us however during the rally not a single council ranger was present. We attracted approximately 200 people. Many of these came to the November 30 Sydney “Walk against the War” rally as the “Manly for Peace” group .

Our November 23 rally platform included a broad range of speakers including Ian Cohen (Greens,) Arthur Chesterfield-Evans (Democrats), Gabr Elgafi (Chairperson, Supreme Islamic Council), Catholics for Social Justice and more. Indeed the breadth of our plat-

form made it more difficult for the police and council to stop us.

Our rally provided the opportunity to make contact with many local groups and individuals, gain more local media coverage through a clever media stunt on Manly beach and further win the respect of many locals as the initiators and organisers of the anti-war campaign in the area. It was a useful learning experience for our comrades and a great confidence builder.

One area our branch needs to address is our work around local issues. Sydney Central Socialist Alliance branch has participated in the very successful “Save Callan Park” campaign. Marrickville has had the “Save Erskineville Estates” however our branch is yet to really intervene in a local campaign. We had plans to become involved in “Save Mona Vale Hospital” however that campaign seems to have reached some resolution, at least for the time being. In short, campaigning around local issues is certainly an area of political work we need to address.

Building Socialist Alliance on the Northside

There is a space for Socialist Alliance on the Northside. It seems that unless we are the ones initiating and organising campaigns around Refugee rights and against the war, it’s often not done.

It could be said that our Socialist Alliance comrades in Northside NoWar are the motivating, organising and driving force behind the very successful work Chatswood NoWar has achieved.

Our Socialist Alliance members are good activists and terrific organisers. Indeed our various political backgrounds and extensive experience from many years of campaigning around all sorts of issues has drawn together a strong campaigning team. In short, our collective skills far outweigh our size and despite our numbers and political weight on the North, our comrades have achieved a great deal in 18 months. But there is still enormous untapped potential for us.

While we have over 60 contacts and 19 financial members the majority of these are largely inactive. The question must be asked: How can we harness this potential, inspire and draw more people into activity and build our Socialist Alliance?

While we have done some outstanding work, a great deal has been done on the run, by only a small number of us. The infrequency of meetings, mostly monthly, has meant that organising events is largely left to a few people and often not involving our passive members and contacts.

One way of resolving this is to move to a more regular meeting schedule where we have the opportunity to discuss and plan our events and campaigns well in advance.

What we have decided to do is move to a fortnightly meeting schedule. One meeting is our monthly public event, e.g., with a guest speaker talking on a local campaign or something broader such as the anti-terrorist legislation. This is one campaign we want to run on in the lead up to the NSW state elections and we have already scheduled two public meetings around this for 2003.

Further down the track we might invite an international guest to speak on Aceh, West Papua, Indonesia, Philippines, Latin America etc. We all have many contacts that we can utilise. We can also continue holding political film screenings etc, the potential is limitless and we have already had lots of success with doing this.

Our alternative fortnightly meeting is to be used to plan our calendar, newsletter, stalls and campaigns, discuss who is around us and discuss our contacting and perhaps include a short and interesting educational e.g., on the role of the World Trade Organisation, current trade unions campaigns, international solidarity

work etc. Our members have a wide range of skills in these areas and we can learn from each other. The key to successful meetings is well-planned and interesting reports and thorough contacting.

Our organising meetings would also provide us with the opportunity to talk with and involve our contacts and passive members. We could combine an occasional organising meeting with a working bee making placards and painting banners.

As a large number of our membership and newer contacts are from the Manly area we are going to alternate between Manly and Chatswood to provide an opportunity for people in both areas to stay in contact.

There is enormous potential for our growth, but our infrequency in meeting and organising has limited our potential. Raising our profile and growing requires a more serious and professional approach, especially in the lead-up to the elections, and our monthly organising meetings is the next step we are taking to build our Socialist Alliance. ■

'Who we are, where we stand, how we work'

Quick thoughts on the draft perspectives statement

By Jonathan Strauss (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

I would like to throw some quick thoughts into the melting pot of discussion on a perspectives statement for Socialist Alliance, which Dick Nichols' draft initiates.

1. The draft has something of the character of a manifesto. Its title should express this, especially as this would probably become a public document. Unfortunately, I've only been able to think of examples that are a bit grandiose.

2. I think international developments (first section, third paragraph) should be the first thing mentioned: the collapse of capitalist triumphalism / resurgence of the movement questioning the impact of capitalism; and the resurgence and urge to unity of the socialist movement. In both cases references and examples from the movement(s) in the Third World (perhaps the World Social Forum, and the development of parties in Asia and/or Latin America) are also needed.

3. What are "community" activists (first section, sixth paragraph)? Presumably this is meant to operate as a covering catch-all concept. "Other community campaigns", for example, would capture the intent better.

4. Our claim to "know" the alternative society needed is socialism (second section, last paragraph) could put up a barrier to discussion with those who are not convinced of this, because it may suggest to them we are not willing to debate this. We might be better off saying this is what we "understand".

5. Among the struggles we are committed to, international solidarity is not sufficiently covered by referring to support for peace and international cooperation. In the third section, part b, third paragraph, add immediately after "the environment", "for the working peo-

ple of every nation to be able to determine their own affairs without interference" or similar. Also, in the Conclusion, add to the second paragraph "and to act in solidarity with the working people of the world in their struggles".

6. The point that "the Socialist Alliance is a membership organisation...all members, whether or not they belong to organisations, participate on an equal basis" is found in the fifth section, second paragraph, but also in the first section, fifth paragraph. The latter should be deleted.

7. I'm sure many people would have ideas for editing the document for style. One bit I found I had to reread, though, was the "socialism opposes" section. This could be presented as a list, using dashes to separate each socialist principle from its capitalist opposite.

8. Finally, and most substantially, I have read the comments of the International Socialist Organisation (in its October 3 National Executive letter to the DSP Political Committee) on the draft's presentation of the "need for a radically different sort of government".

I guess DSP members and ISO members in Socialist Alliance both understand revolutionary intent is the logic of consistent working class struggle. The point of contention between the draft and the letter, however, does not appear to be whether or not a majority of Socialist Alliance members might agree with a "statement of revolutionary intent". Rather, it is whether or not there is sufficient agreement within Socialist Alliance to place such a statement in a "constitutional" document.

I believe the Socialist Alliance must commit itself to unceasingly fight for the interests of the working class and of all the oppressed. It needs to find the way

to say, in its words, “by any means necessary”, which Malcolm X proposed as the motto for his Organisation of Afro-American Unity (“our rights to protect [our]selves’, “we will strike at an unjust condition”). Socialism, if it is not to be just phrase-mongering, must mean no acceptance of the boundaries the capitalists and their state want to place on our struggle (whatever compromises are forced on us by a balance of forces temporarily in their favour).

Could we then provide examples to illustrate this approach? The draft already uses ones such as Lucas Aerospace with regard to the point of production. In the field of politics, though, examples such as the Paris

Commune, Chile, or May-June 1968 in France just take us straight back to the question of revolution.

These are the reasons why a more general, implicit statement is both necessary and better. We cannot avoid saying the working class must assert its power, including its capacity for political organisation and administration, to defend its interests. Working people, however, will discover in practice the need for this and create the organisations to do this only in the course of the class struggle. If the Socialist Alliance, as it develops, can increasingly provide the ideas and demands that assist the working class to learn and organise, then it will have done its job well. ■

RESOLUTIONS OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Perspectives on Socialist Alliance joint work and discussion

The following perspectives for the Socialist Alliance's work were agreed unanimously at the November 22 National Executive:

- An open-ended discussion about the nature of the Alliance, and around key political questions like the nature of reformism, the nature of the trade union bureaucracy, etc. This process should lead up to the annual conference in May, but not end there.
- A further strengthening of union collaboration. What has been achieved to date in the NTEU could be replicated in the CPSU, another union where the Alliance has a relatively large membership. We should investigate in which other unions, from state to state, caucuses would be useful. We should also encourage cross-union committees like the Alliance solidarity committee in Melbourne. We should organise another round of union seminars across the country. We should

strengthen our collaboration in campaign work, in particular in anti-war and refugee rights' campaigns.

- Raising the Alliance profile by campaigning under its banner where we can—for instance, the Alliance is an excellent vehicle for initiating or building protests against the recent ASIO raids on Muslim families.
- Raising the Alliance profile more regularly and thoroughly on all rallies and at other public events, using placards, leaflets, etc. The ISO understands that this would involve making greater resources available than at present.
- Holding Alliance public meetings on key topics as broad platforms of the left, and organising debate across the left on contentious issues. ■

Policy on the Discussion Bulletin

Agreed unanimously at the November 22 National Executive:

That the Discussion Bulletin be distributed in three ways:

By email to all those branches that specifically indicate that they wish to receive the Bulletin by email;

Via the web with all branches being advised by email that the bulletin is available on the web and giving the URL link;

By printing out a specific number of hard copies, to be forwarded to the branches and paid for by them.

That only Australian Socialist Alliance members can submit material, but can, within reason, include other material as an appendix.

That Discussion Bulletins include an international digest of references, and ask for people to email in their suggestions. ■

Recruitment and membership campaign

The following resolution on a recruitment campaign was adopted unanimously at the December 13 National Executive:

1. To launch a two-month recruitment campaign to last from February 1 to April 1, 2003;

2. To encourage branches (and regions and states) to set targets for (a) converting non-financial members into financial members (b) recruiting new financial members, and (c) recruiting "special" individual recruits (well-known activists, left-academics, migrant

community leaders etc);

3. To produce the necessary material for the campaign, including an updated recruiting brochure, A2 and skinny poster, booklet of the Founding Conference, with translations of the recruiting brochure into as many migrant languages as can be managed, as well as an updated membership form;

4. To plan "Meet Socialist Alliance" forums in communities and suburbs where branches judge the Alliance can get a sympathetic reception. ■

Humphrey McQueen tour

The following resolution on a tour by Humphrey McQueen was adopted unanimously at the December 13 National Executive:

This meeting of the National Executive resolves to endorse a tour of eastern state universities by Humphrey McQueen for early March 2003. The lecture would be a popular exposition of the workings of

global capitalism. National Socialist Alliance would meet McQueen's travel costs and state organisations would reimburse national Socialist Alliance for the costs involved in travel to and from their state. McQueen would be lodged with Socialist Alliance comrades. ■

Membership and finances

The following resolution on membership and finances was adopted unanimously at the December 13 National Executive:

This meeting of the National Executive resolves that:

1. The Socialist Alliance financial membership system is based on quarters, with the financial membership year beginning on April 1;
2. Financial members of the Socialist Alliance will therefore belong to one of four quarters—April, July, October, or January;
3. Membership dues for members joining in April, May or June will fall due in April the following year; for members joining in July, August or September in July the following year; for members joining in October, November and December in October the following year; and for members joining in January, February and March in January the following year;
4. Members whose membership is falling due shall be billed by branches in April, July, October and January, with a renewal letter to be sent two months prior to the expiry of financial membership;
5. The system shall apply from January 2003;
6. All Socialist Alliance membership forms and joiner ads shall be amended to include a space for the date of joining;
7. Branches will submit to the Socialist Alliance national office their numbers of new members and lapses in the four categories of membership every quarter [see draft form];
8. On the basis of this information Socialist Alliance national office will bill branches quarterly for the 25 per cent of dues owed to the national organisation.
9. This membership system replaces all previous arrangements. ■

Financial requirement for branches to have delegation to May 2003 National Conference

The following resolution on financial conditions for branches to have a valid delegation to the May 2003 National Conference was adopted at the December 13 National Executive with one abstention:

That delegates for the May 2003 National Conference be based on financial membership for the January-March 2003 quarter to be paid by branches to the National Executive by 14 April 2003.

Socialist Alliance national newsletter

The following resolution on a Socialist Alliance newsletter was adopted unanimously at the December 13 National Executive:

This meeting of the National Executive resolves to produce a monthly printed newsletter from the New

Year, as well as a weekly e-newsletter and a news forum on the website.

The National Executive recommends to each branch that it appoint/elect one comrade with responsibility to communicating local news to the newsletter. ■

Draft resolution on affiliation to the Socialist Alliance

The following resolution below was for initial discussion. It was agreed that the National Conveners would produce an improved draft for decision at the next National Executive hook-up, set for January 31, 2003.

The draft resolution on criteria for new affiliations was as follows:

Organisations wishing to affiliate to Socialist Alliance will submit an application to the National Conveners. They will consider the application and make a recommendation to the National Executive for or against provisional affiliation. The following

National Conference will make a decision about ongoing affiliation.

Organisations which are eligible for affiliation include: socialist political tendencies, either with or

without international associations; trade union branches; working class solidarity and community organisations. {Alternative: Organisations which are eligible for affiliation include all those that meet the criteria below.}

The criteria to be used in assessing applications are:

- 1 Agreement with the platform;
- 2 Agreeing to abide by the constitution;
- 3 Having similar aims and objectives to the Socialist Alliance;
- 4 Having at least five members who are Socialist Alliance members or are willing to join and who are not members of other affiliates.

A large affiliate is defined as one with more than 100 members.