

DISCUSSION
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National Executive resolution on draft documents

The following two documents are presented for discussion by all Socialist Alliance members in the run-up to our May 10-11 Second National Conference. In presenting the documents the March 21 National Executive voted “that the two draft documents for the National Conference be published in the Discussion Bulletin, the perspectives document in the name of Dick Nichols and the document on

Socialist Alliance work in the unions in the name of the National Conveners, on the clear understanding that all affiliates, individual National Executive members and Socialist Alliance members generally are free to advance amendments, addenda and counterpositions to the documents”.

Putting socialism on the Australian political map

Draft perspectives document for the second Socialist Alliance National Conference,
May 10-11, 2003.

By Dick Nichols, National Co-convenor

***Note by Dick Nichols:** Because of differences on perspectives among the National Conveners, it has been agreed by the National Executive that I should present this document in my own name to the membership of Socialist Alliance. I invite any Alliance member who agrees with its general approach to participate in improving it and to forward any suggestions to me at dicknichols@dsp.org.au. Through this process—and on the basis of the general discussion within the Alliance—an improved text supported by those who agree with its general line will be produced closer to the conference.*

Any contribution or suggestions that comrades would like to make towards the specific resolutions that are flagged in this draft would also be most welcome.

1. Introduction

Since its founding in February 2001 the Socialist Alliance has clearly strengthened the socialist presence in Australian politics. We are regularly being surprised by how widely the Alliance is known.

There are potentially thousands of Australians who want to belong to a socialist organization—provided it is big and active enough, democratically and professionally run.

The Alliance affiliates—operating apart and in competition—would have drawn only a small fraction of this precious resource into socialist politics. The left unity realised in the Alliance has greatly increased the potential for growing the socialist cause in Australia, just as it has in other countries.

Two years of “living together” have also shown us that left unity works: when we act together the political impact is many times what we can achieve separately. That’s because the Alliance has been able to respond to the big issues of politics over the past two years with a clear, unambiguous line—adopted unanimously or by large majority.

At the same time the Alliance has set in place a healthy, democratic culture and method of work, despite inevitable differences and tensions and specific aspects that need improving.

As a result we have achieved an election result as high as 6.1 per cent (in the March 2003 Brimbank municipal poll)

and had a powerful intervention in the anti-war movement in many centres.

However, the Alliance is still far from realising its potential. We are just beginning to organise our work in the unions, social movements, migrant communities, among young people and in scores of suburban, regional and rural centres.

Our second National Conference also comes as the biggest political radicalisation since the 1970s is under way. This radicalisation, which has peaked in the extraordinarily massive movement against the impending war on Iraq, is producing a broad leftward shift in big sections of society.

Most obviously reflected in the rise of the Greens, this change raises the bar even higher for Socialist Alliance.

Will newly radicalising people and older leftists—people looking for a way to be active in the struggle against war and economic rationalism—turn to the Alliance? Or will they turn to the Greens as a more “realistic” alternative? How many will be drawn to those left organizations which, so far, have turned their back on the Alliance? How many will shun party political activity altogether and confine their effort to the movements?

Within the Alliance the last nine months have been marked by the ongoing debate over whether it can and should evolve into a united socialist organisation (with full rights of tendency). Clearly at this point in its development the Alliance remains an alliance, with individual affiliates free to contribute to it according to their conception of its role and their available resources. Nonetheless, the Alliance as a whole and all its affiliate organizations will need to continue their discussion on this vital issue.

However, irrespective of developments in this essential discussion at its second National Conference the Alliance has to face up to the concrete challenges and opportunities that its own growth and the stormy rise in the class struggle are creating.

In the run-up to the conference all Alliance members need to think about how we can reach out to every potential sympathiser, intervene in struggles at all levels and explain

the socialist approach and solution to the plagues of capitalist society to every interested person.

This document aims to sketch out a plan for reaching that goal.

Part A. Where we are now

2. The rise of the Greens and tensions in the ALP

The Australian Labor Party has lost hundreds of thousands of voters to the Greens. While this trend is partially masked by the shift of sections of former Coalition supporters to Labor the ALP has overwhelmingly lost appeal to the rising generation that wants to act for progressive change in Australian society.

The underlying reason for the desertion of Labor is clear enough. The policy possibilities for an alternative “party of government” in today’s world of intense global and inter-imperialist competition are very restricted—old reformism can offer fewer and fewer reforms. Typical here are the ALP’s “alternatives” in refugee and education policy.

Massive anti-war demonstrations and organising pushed have finally pushed Simon Crean to oppose a war on Iraq without UN backing. This may help partially revive the party’s lost support, but will be seen by many as half-hearted and opportunist.

The shift to the Greens comes on top of the continuing erosion of support for Labor among working people and unionists, symbolised in New South Wales by Bob Carr’s “finger” to the unionists—many of them ALP members—protesting his government’s cuts to workers’ compensation outside NSW Parliament House.

Labor’s decades of betrayals in government, coupled with the general inaction or connivance of ALP-led or influenced unions, has left hundreds of thousands of working people disenchanted, angry and apathetic towards their traditional political home. It has created a political vacuum. That poses the need to rebuild working-class organisation and representation from the bottom up, in the unions and in party politics.

This imperative lies at the heart of the Socialist Alliance project. We work to renew the labour movement, by helping rebuild democratic, militant unionism and by helping to create a mass party of working people with socialist politics.

(i) *The Greens*

The rise of the Greens has followed naturally and inevitably from Labor’s betrayals. While the Greens have been gradually accumulating support for a couple of decades, they received a huge boost from Labor’s attempt to match the Coalition’s racist and xenophobic refugee policy—typified by Beazley’s standing “shoulder to shoulder” with Howard over the *Tampa* incident.

Since then the Greens have gone from strength to strength, also helped by the crisis of the Democrats and disgust with Howard among “wet” Liberals. The Greens are now seen as “viable” in conventional political terms and this has resulted in their consolidating a significant political base. Twenty five per cent of inner-city Melbourne and Sydney

and 60 per cent of tertiary educated people under the age of 26 now vote Green.

For Socialist Alliance this turn to the Greens marks a big step forward in Australian politics. It deepens a left and dissident mood in society and helps provide more fertile ground for the socialist message.

The rise of the Greens potentially draws tens of thousands of people into the unavoidable discussion about alternatives to economic rationalism. How can the Greens’ four principles (peace and non-violence, sustainability, social justice and democracy) actually become real organising principles for social life?

The rise of the Greens also helps to legitimise social protest. The Greens are overwhelmingly seen as a party that acts outside parliament, beginning with Bob Brown’s leading role in the movement to save the Franklin River.

Moreover, while many Greens are conservative (as revealed by their position on population limits, immigration and a general “small is beautiful” outlook), these form only one current and do not set the general tone within the party. To date and despite receiving considerable support from disaffected Liberal voters the Green advance has been marked by the general predominance of a left wing, especially in the New South Wales. NSW Green parliamentarians have made a point of taking a clear pro-worker and pro-public sector stand on industrial and welfare issues.

At the same time the Green expansion reflects the fact that the present social radicalisation is still in an early phase. Inevitably, the vast majority of people entering the Green camp from Labor still see political change as coming through a vote for “good people” with “good policy”. This impression is reinforced by Green successes in forcing concessions from Labor governments, such as NSW premier Bob Carr’s sudden conversion to keeping Callan Park as a public reserve on the day after the Green victory in the Cunningham by-election.

However, as the social radicalisation develops it will also intensify the contradictions within Green policy and practice—among the “red-greens”, “green-greens” and “blue-greens”, between its reformists and radicals and between its parliamentary and activist wings, all of whom can presently live together without too many problems. Who will win these impending political battles is not predetermined and the stronger Socialist Alliance becomes the better the chances of left forces within the Greens.

(ii) *The ALP*

Within the ALP discontent continues to rise. As the ALP machine moves to close off the last remnants of rank-and-file democracy in the preselection of its parliamentary candidates membership revolts continue to break out, most recently in the form of the Peter Wilson ticket in the Cunningham by-election.

The Wilson campaign was largely an operation to punish NSW ALP Head Office for inserting its own candidate against the wish of local ALP branches. However, its very existence dramatised the issue that is central to the Socialist Alliance’s concerns—how are the interests of labour,

working people, to be represented and championed politically?

Given that it is practically impossible for parliamentary Labor to allow even the increase in democratic space envisaged in the Wran-Hawke report the issues of working class representation and how unions decide their political funding will become more urgent. (This issue is treated in more detail in the conference document on Socialist Alliance practice in the trade unions).

The decline of the ALP does not mean its extinction in the near future. However, it is very difficult to imagine the ALP easily rewinning the political space it has lost to the Greens or an end to rising tensions with the unions, even right-wing unions. Labor's commitment to the basic tenets of economic rationalism means that ongoing disaffection with the ALP will remain, as will the opening for the socialist alternative.

3. Our achievements, problems and potential

(i) Membership

The Alliance's membership data is contained in the appendix to this text. They show a steady expansion in the overall membership of the organization since its founding. This has enabled us to succeed in all electoral registration campaigns undertaken to date—federal, NSW, Victorian and Tasmanian.

This achievement, especially in Tasmania and New South Wales where the electoral registration provisions are totally undemocratic and draconian, can make all members be proud. No other left or socialist organization has managed this feat in decades.

At the same time there has been a steady increase in the financial membership of the Alliance, from 648 at the end of the third quarter of 2002 to 681 at the end of 2002. There will be a marked upturn in membership in the first quarter of 2004, as a result of greater attention to membership renewal and our February-March recruitment campaign. These figures reflect the steady growth of the Alliance as an organisation with which increasing numbers identify and in which they wish to be politically active.

This growth has been seen in most branches, but is at its strongest in those members that have most succeeded in implanting the branch in local political life—winning a reputation for Socialist Alliance as a leader and consistent supporter of people's struggles. Such branches also have the highest proportion of active to passive members.

At the same time there has been a steady growth in the proportion of Alliance members who are not members of any of the founding affiliates. At the time of the Founding Conference members of affiliates accounted for roughly 50-55 per cent of the total membership. By the second National Conference this figure will have fallen to 20-25 per cent as the Alliance membership has grown as a result of our electoral registration campaigns.

At the same time, however, the proportion of financial members who belong to the affiliate organizations still remains around 40-45 per cent, indicating that the Alliance is still a considerable way from being an organization in which

the non-affiliate part of the total membership increasingly determines the Alliance's political life.

(ii) Election results

The election results achieved by the Alliance in the last two years confirm that there is a "bedrock" vote for socialism in Australia at election time of between one and two per cent. This result, which was not bettered by any other socialist candidate, is certainly not to be despised. In the context of a "greenslide" which has attracted all the broadly anti-neoliberal vote hundreds of voters in the average working class electorate have affirmed an identity with socialism. In the most working-class and migrant electorates this percentage rises, just as the Green vote proportionately drops.

Where the vote for Alliance candidates has been higher (as in the Northern Territory) it is usually because the Greens have been weak or the Alliance has enjoyed an unusual level of mainstream publicity (certainly not the case in the latest NSW and Victorian polls).

To date the Alliance has not achieved any presence in institutions (parliaments, municipalities etc).

We can be confident that such results—and the lively campaigns that won them—provide a solid foundation on which local Alliance branches can build. However, branch-building clearly requires more than doing a better campaign the next time elections come around. The Alliance's effectiveness as an electoral instrument requires a strong profile between elections, and a strong presence in radicalising parts of the working class and social movements.

That is, the Alliance needs to become an organization which has lively and coherent campaigns and propaganda activity outside election time, and which really leads the struggles of the day.

(iii) Movement intervention

The Alliance's greatest organised presence is in the anti-war movement. In many centres, including Perth, Adelaide, Newcastle, Hobart, Lismore, Wollongong and Launceston, Alliance members have figured as chairpeople and speakers at major rallies and Alliance members are seen to be at the heart of the anti-war organising effort.

The best testimony to our advance in this last area is not our own say-so but the reaction of our political opponents, with the Alliance being subject to increased counter-manoeuvres and even red-baiting from ALP and other opponents the more our influence increases.

Given that we really only began to approach the job of organising a specific Alliance movement interventions in late 2002 (see National Executive resolution of 22 November 2002 in *Discussion Bulletin* Volume 2 Number 1), this represents real progress. It again confirms the ability of the socialist left to act much more powerfully through the framework of the Alliance than on an individual basis.

This has also been the case with specific Alliance initiatives in the trade unions and in union solidarity. We recall the September 2002 solidarity rally with militant unionism in Melbourne, the ongoing work of the Melbourne Trade Union Solidarity Committee, as well as the various interstate public meetings by Craig Johnston as part of the

campaign against the federal AMWU intervention against the elected Workers First leadership of the Victorian AMWU.

The Alliance has very big potential to be the central force in rebuilding a militant democratic unionism in this country, much as the old Communist Party of Australia was the backbone of the Militant Minority Movement in the 1930s.

Generally speaking, however, the bulk of the work that has been agreed upon is not implemented consistently. This state of affairs is partly due to the uneven implantation and influence of the individual affiliates from centre to centre, and partly to the differing conceptions of the role of the Alliance itself—in particular the degree to which it should be the organising framework of interventions of the left beyond elections.

(iv) Life of Alliance branches

The mixed experience of the last two years of building the Alliance points to three essential ingredients for a healthy Alliance local branch. They are (1) regular and imaginative political activity (2) lively meetings that feature an absorbing political component (film, discussion of controversial issues etc) along with clearly presented proposals for activity, and (3) a democratically elected branch leadership and/or convening team, clearly responsible to the branch membership.

Experience has shown that where any of these ingredients is missing (and branch meetings become boring or inefficient or the democratic functioning of meetings and members rights aren't clear or there is no plan to "get out there" with our message) then members simply won't come. In the worst cases, rare to date but still a warning sign, members have left Socialist Alliance for the Greens because these were seen to be "doing more".

On the other hand, in the present massive upturn of struggle it is already clear that local Alliance branches have huge opportunities, providing they know how to seize them. The experiences of Sydney Northside in the Manly area, where a small nucleus of Alliance comrades has been central to organising the local peace movement in its wide range of initiatives shows what can be achieved.

(v) Our growth potential

On the basis of our experience to date it's clear that the prospect before the Alliance is one of *more opportunities than it can fulfil with its present degree of resources and level of organization*. Potential expansion paths, many barely surveyed, include:

Left migrant organizations and communities. Many such communities know us, organise support at election time and sometimes vaguely associate with the Alliance at demonstrations. But in no case to date have we had the time to explore and negotiate an ongoing and increasing involvement by such communities in the political life of the Alliance. Yet, such is the profile the Alliance has already achieved that hundreds of socialists and left-wingers in many migrant communities already vaguely identify with the Alliance as "their party" in Australia.

Rural and regional Australia. The Alliance continues to pick up members and supporters in rural and regional Australia, some of whom are active for the Alliance in their

communities. To date, however, despite the growth of members and sympathisers at large we have only been able to build one new regional branch—Launceston, and this because of the availability of a part-time organiser. With a greater organisational effort the Launceston experience can be repeated in such regions as the Victorian goldfields, NSW Northern Rivers and along the Queensland coast.

Growth in the suburbs. While the Alliance has given the left and socialist movement a much greater presence in the suburbs of the major cities than it ever had in the form of separate organizations a lot remains to be done to draw members at large and potential members into functioning branches. This process would also be speeded up if resources could be found to devote to building such branches.

Universities and other tertiary education institutes. Generally speaking, the Alliance is not recruiting enough young people. Winning them will generally require persuading them of socialist analysis and solutions, something the Alliance is presently ill-equipped to do.

"Non-branch" Alliance sympathisers. The Alliance enjoys the support and interest of a lot of members and sympathisers who can't or don't want to take part in Alliance life through its basic routine of branch meetings and community and suburban stalls. Yet such members, especially those with a specific interest, training or professional skill, could make a much greater contribution to the Alliance if only we could work out forms of organization suited to their needs and interests.

(vi) Problems of functioning, resources and implementation

The Alliance presently suffers from a shortage of resources and growth bottlenecks at all levels. The shortages range from literature, including basic propaganda for socialism, to basic material resources.

Our main shortcoming is in propaganda. The literature the Alliance has produced, especially in relation to the war on Iraq, stands up very well and has been put to good use well beyond our ranks. However, while the Alliance's lacks its own publication, it will always be difficult to project it as a serious political organization. Regular production of broadsheets would be a valuable first step forward, but would still leave the important jobs of analysis, debate and in-depth propaganda to be done

To make use of the opportunities for influence and growth the Alliance needs to expand beyond its present range of publications to produce, at the very least, a regular magazine. and a publication on "Why you should be a socialist".

We also need to improve our decision-making processes. While the National Executive structure adopted at the Founding Conference has worked well enough, and quick decisions have been able to be made by the National Conveners in consultation with the National Executive, two sets of problems have come to light.

The first is that of a disconnection between the political life of the Alliance as a national organization and at the branch level. Despite the fact that National Executive agendas are circulated at all levels of the organization there is practically no direct input from branches into National

Executive debates and decisions. As a result the main “raw material” of national Alliance decision-making continues to come from the affiliate organizations.

In itself there is nothing wrong with this—the greater the contribution from affiliates the better the political life of the Alliance itself. However, without greater connection between national decision-making and the experience of the branches there will be a certain tendency for non-affiliated members of the Alliance, who belong solely to branches, to become second-class citizens within the organisation.

While the elections of state/territory representatives as part of the National Executive at the Founding Conference was intended to provide a channel to the concerns and thinking of local organisations, the fact that these representatives were elected directly by the conference and not by some representative state/territory gathering has left the link between national and local debates and activity weaker than it should be.

The second problem is one of achieving a timely intervention in a fast-unfolding political situation. To some extent this is inevitable—the Alliance is an alliance and consultation and discussion take time. However, we need to think about (1) how to have quick interventions carried out by other bodies within the Alliance besides the National Conveners and (2) how to better equip branches to act effectively on national priorities.

The gap between branch and national discussion and decision-making is also directly related to the problem of an under-resourced Alliance national office. Timely production of draft agendas and conscious provision of time and space for branch input and proposals cannot happen without more national resources.

The national office of the Alliance is struggling to implement the decisions of the National Executive, with production of agreed projects like a monthly national newsletter lagging behind schedule. Any increase in the class struggle puts extra strain on an already overloaded operation.

The National Executive decision to form a working group to help the National Conveners has helped ease the situation a little, especially because a number of comrades have volunteered time, but much more remains to be done. Finding the ways in which the affiliate organizations could make a greater contribution to the implementation of national Alliance work would be a definite step forward.

Part B: What we should do next

4. Strengthening resistance to economic rationalism, racism and war

Over the last two years the Alliance has consistently sought to unite with other political forces in the fight against war, economic rationalism and racism. It is a vital force in anti-war movement.

It has also continued to push for left unity, repeating invitations to all socialist organizations still remaining outside the Alliance. We have also striven to strengthen collaboration with socialist-minded and progressive people in parties like the Greens and the ALP. We want to build a

stronger anti-capitalist “red-green” alliance with which to better fight the ongoing neo-liberal offensive.

The response to our initiatives has varied widely. In some localities collaboration with the Greens has been extremely close, both in local peace work and at election time. At the other extreme various left organizations have studiously ignored all our offers of dialogue and collaboration. With others, such as the Progressive Labor Party, our attempts at collaboration or, at the very least, non-aggression agreements at election time have effectively been snubbed.

Despite these negative responses the example of left unity provided by the Alliance remains a powerful example and we must not abandon our offer for dialogue and collaboration with all socialist and left forces. In a period of unprecedented breakdown of “normal” capitalist politics it corresponds to a deeply-felt aspiration of tens of thousands of left, progressive and socialist people.

(i) Relations with the Greens

The rise of the Greens dictates that we develop a policy of permanent engagement with them. This will involve:

Joint campaigns. All our campaign initiatives (such as the demand that the Senate opposition parties block supply) should in general be proposed to the Greens. Green support for such initiatives greatly increases their impact. At the local level Alliance members should seek to be in continuous discussion with Green organizations over joint initiatives that can advance our common positions of opposition to economic rationalism;

Electoral agreements. Alliance organizations will always think carefully about how to relate to the Greens at election time. While the Alliance will in nearly all conditions present its own candidates—no-one else is going to put the socialist message across so forcefully—there will be occasions in which Green candidates stand on platforms which come close to expressing the same priorities as the Alliance’s and/or express a real left shift in popular and working-class sentiment. In such cases local organizations should consider withdrawing their candidate, with a clear statement as to why the Alliance is supporting another candidate;

“Red-green” campaigns. There have already been examples of discussions, especially at the municipal level, of the possibility of combined Alliance-Green election tickets. Provided they are based on a clear and principled platform such “red-green” election campaigns provide a valuable example of left unity, to be vigorously promoted;

Ongoing discussion. The Alliance shares the four Green principles. The key differences between the Alliance and the Greens lie in the area of strategy. To develop this discussion we look to promote an ongoing dialogue with the Greens. At the same time the detailed policy development achieved by the Greens should act as a spur to the Alliance’s own policy development process.

(ii) Breaks from the ALP and tensions within the ALP

Important battles in Australian political life always open up divisions within this party—between those who directly embrace the needs of capitalist competitiveness and those who continue to defend trade union and worker rights and

are sensitive to the aspirations of the various movements of resistance.

The Alliance always looks to engage with left-leaning ALP branches and currents. In the case of actual left breaks from Labor local Alliance organizations will use the same criteria as with the Greens in deciding whether to run candidates.

In relation to Green, left Labor and other progressive trends the Alliance will always be the voice of left unity. Where feasible we will campaign for single candidates of the left as well as for broad union- and community-sponsored candidates.

In the light of this approach conference should renew its appeal to all socialist and progressive organizations to join the Alliance as well as well as its appeals to the Greens, and left ALP currents to develop joint work and discussion (see separate resolutions).

5. Strengthening the Socialist Alliance

While we shall always continue to press for socialist, left and “red-green” unity, in the end the ability of the Alliance to convince other forces to work more closely with us will depend most of all on having a stronger Socialist Alliance.

It is also a law of politics that no organisation can hope to survive by standing still—it either advances by seizing the opportunities and challenges of real political life or it decays. This is especially true of the Alliance today.

What, then, must the Alliance do in the next period? (Where needed resolutions outlining more detailed implementation proposals will be presented in separate session.)

(i) *Develop key campaigns* (such as that against the GST and Howard’s forthcoming war budget) that mobilise popular anger and opinion against the most blatantly anti-worker policies of capitalist governments. We must also develop clear, popular proposals which dramatise exactly how the living standards and quality of life of the majority could be advanced by measures paid for by the tiny superrich minority;

(ii) *Further develop a united Socialist Alliance intervention in the movements.* Conference should resolve to set up working groups to cover its intervention in anti-war, refugee rights, women’s liberation, gay, lesbian and transsexual rights, Asia-Pacific solidarity and Latin American solidarity. Potential candidates for conveners should be suggested from the relevant workshops at this conference and confirmed by the final session of conference. Conference urges forthcoming state/territory conferences to carry out the same approach;

(iii) *Produce a clear explanation of why people should join a socialist organisation.* Conference should resolve to produce a book presenting a clear and vigorously argued case for socialism (see separate resolution);

(iv) *Develop socialist propaganda.* Conference should resolve to regularise the production of the Alliance’s broadsheets. It should also resolve to move, as soon as resources allow, to the production of a regular Alliance magazine (see separate resolution);

(v) *Make a sustained effort to consolidate its members and supporters in the trade unions in a current fighting for*

democratic, militant unionism. How we do this is covered in the separate resolution on Alliance work in the trade unions;

(vi) *Develop a plan—and resources for implementing it—to follow up the various the potential growth paths outlined in Section 3.* Part of this job can be carried out by branches, but any branch effort will be better if it is part of national, state or regional campaigns (see separate resolution)

(vii) *Further develop our founding platform and detailed policy.* This requires a sustained effort at analysing all the varied aspects of Australian social life and the Australian environment with a view to developing its policy alternatives (see separate resolution);

(viii) *Develop Socialist Alliance educational work.* With the Humphrey McQueen tour the Alliance took its first major step in this area. But further popularising the socialist cause and deepening our grasp of the potential shape and lines of development of socialism in Australia requires ongoing analysis and discussion (see separate resolution);

Action on these eight points is essential if the Alliance is to keep pace with events. However, even if we adopt these proposals and work hard at implementing them they will all be seriously undermined if the Alliance as a whole doesn’t work hard at making its branches the natural political home of left and radical political activists. Our branches have to show in practice that they are *necessary* to those who are active in left political activity.

This means making branch meetings a place where members can together organise the struggles in which they are involved *better than would otherwise have been the case.*

It means making meetings and forums places of informative, lively and politically enriching discussion.

If we cannot achieve this minimum we have no right to be disappointed if new members and people who are just checking us out do not stick around.

It is a challenge for all of us to face.

6. Developing the resources for growth

None of the proposals outlined above can be carried out without making better use of the existing resources of the Alliance and its affiliates and expanding the resources available to the Alliance as a whole.

The present system of annual dues plus income from merchandise and branch, regional and state fundraising for specific campaigns does not provide the Alliance with the resources its needs to carry out these proposals. This is particularly so because it is unlikely that the Alliance will win parliamentary representation in the near future.

Conference should therefore adopt the following general approach;

(i) *Expand the Alliance financial base.* To begin to cover the resource gap conference should resolve to establish a voluntary national pledge/subscription system, preferably based on automatic deductions (see separate resolution).

(ii) *Create a network of organisers.* The geographical expansion of the Alliance will be greatly aided by the creation of local and regional organisers (full or part time). Such organisers would be responsible to the relevant state/territory or local Alliance organisation. To promote this goal conference should urge the creation of state/territory

pledge/subscription systems along the lines outlined in (i) (see separate resolution).

(iii) *Make better use of the resources of affiliates.* The first two years of the Alliance have been marked by debate over whether the literature and other resources of affiliates should appear on Alliance stalls. As matters now stand the Alliance can offer only a very restricted range of literature and paraphernalia on its stalls. To help overcome this problem conference should resolve that the material of all affiliates can be carried on Alliance stalls (see separate motion).

7. Conclusion: investigating the potential for greater unity

It is clear from the challenge of building the Alliance in the current period that the question of when and under what specific conditions the Alliance should take the step to becoming a united party of socialism in Australia remains on

the table. All Alliance members, whether members of affiliate organizations or not, need to continue to wrestle with this issue.

However, given the still leading role of the affiliate organizations within the Alliance they have a special obligation to continue to clarify their various positions and to make them known to the Alliance membership at large. As part of this process conference therefore asks all affiliate organizations to spell out their views of the preconditions that would have to be fulfilled for the step to a single united party to be taken.

Conference is confident that if such a process of clarification is carried out along with the practical proposals outlined in this document the Socialist Alliance will readily be able to meet the enormous challenges that the present radicalisation is placing before us all.

Appendix: Socialist Alliance membership, financial and total, at December 2002

<i>Branch</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Low-waged</i>	<i>On benefit</i>	<i>High school</i>	<i>Total financial members</i>	<i>Total membership</i>
Adelaide	60	8	8	0	20	60
Brisbane	167	2	3	0	6	167
Canberra	140	3	11	0	16	140
Darwin	30	6	4	0	11	30
Fremantle	See Perth	Part of Perth				See Perth
Geelong	60	10	6	0	28	60
Hobart	250	14	20	0	39	130
Ipswich	12	Part of Brisbane				12
Illawarra	50	1	17	0	24	50
Launceston	8	3	3	0	8	8
Lismore	60	6	12	1	19	60
Melbourne district						
South East	88	4	4	0	13	88
Wills	61	23	33	0	68	61
Melbourne North East	162	13	25	0	50	162
Melbourne West	99	10	3	2	22	99
Seat of Melbourne	180	4	5	1	15	180
Newcastle	100	12	6	0	24	100
Perth	160	24	52	3	89	160
Rockhampton	30	2	3	0	7	30
Sydney district						
Central Sydney	120	8	25	2	39	120
Marrickville	60	15	10	0	36	60
Canterbury-Bankstown	60	14	6	1	30	60
Parramatta	100	22	23	0	47	100
Northside Sydney	50	12	10	1	23	50
Eastern Sydney	50	5	10	0	23	50
Victorian country	39	2	2	1	6	39
NSW country	80	5	8	0	18	80
TOTALS	132	228	309	12	681	2156

Rebuilding democratic, militant unionism—Socialist Alliance and the trade unions

By the National Conveners

Note: The following draft has been endorsed by the National Executive as an agreed starting point for the elaboration of the Socialist Alliance's approach to its work in the trade unions.

A. Introduction--the union movement today

On a global scale, there are more workers and more unionists than ever before. In newly industrialised countries such as Brazil, Korea and Indonesia, unionism has taken root. There has been a huge growth in the working class and in the number of unionists. These new unions often have a militant outlook.

In contrast, in Australia and other advanced capitalist countries union membership has been in decline for decades.

The ALP-ACTU Accord played a central role in this decline. Under Hawke and Keating, unions gave up on rank-and-file organising, looking entirely to deals at the top to advance wage, conditions and the “social wage”.

The results were disastrous—wages and conditions declined, social provision improved only marginally, the agenda of wholesale privatisation was set, the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) and the Australian Federation of Air Pilots (AFAP) were smashed.

Even worse was the demobilisation of the unions. Official rank-and-file structures decayed. Delegates committees became entrenched in constant negotiations over implementation of national agreements, which always included productivity improvement. Mass meetings were few and far between, industrial action even rarer.

That legacy of hollowed-out unions continues to be a dead weight today. However, there are the beginnings of a revival, especially in Victoria. The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) and other construction unions have made gains on hours and conditions. Workers First emerged as a potent force in the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU), supported by the membership on a platform of standing up for members and being prepared to take on the boss.

The Textile, Clothing and Footware Union of Australia (TCFUA) in Victoria has shown what good leadership can achieve. A union whose leadership was racist, sexist and in the bosses' pocket has been completely turned around.

Workers have the chance today to rebuild militant democratic unions. What our class needs is political perspective and organisation.

Historically, union organising has usually involved a conscious intervention by the left. Two examples of this are the Militant Minority Movement, led by the Communist Party in the 1930s and the 1970s shop committees and workers' control movements, led by the Communist Party left and other socialists.

B. Socialists and unions

(i) General

Socialists since Marx have seen trade unions as the vital basic organisations of working class people.

It is only through struggle that the working majority in society wins any gains from the capitalists in our conditions of life. It follows that the better our organization and capacity to struggle, the more we can win and defend. A class without unions is atomised exploitation fodder for the owners of the workplaces.

The working class is also the bearer of the “the other world that is possible”. Only the workers have the social power to challenge the rule of the capitalists—only the workers have the motivation to establish a society based on solidarity. Hence, trade unions are indispensable arenas of struggle for all-round working class, i.e. socialist, politics.

(ii) Our principles

Socialist Alliance's attitude to unions stands on these principles: solidarity, democracy, unity in action, independence from the state and the bosses, militancy, preparedness to break the law when necessary, internationalism and adopting a working class position on all political issues.

These ideas direct our action in the unions, which Socialist Alliance will strive to implement by showing leadership in practice. That leadership is not a one-way street—socialists have to learn as well as teach. We can draw out lessons from the whole history of the working class movement, but we have always to listen to developments amongst the union ranks.

Our goal is to restore the unions to the membership so that they truly become instruments with which a politically conscious membership decides on its own interests and action.

(iii) Leaders and ranks

Unions are most effective as fighting organisations when the ranks are organised, politically conscious and in control of the union and when they have a leadership with the will and the political understanding to lead struggles.

Often, however, unions produce leaderships that prefer an easy life of negotiations with the boss to the hard yakka of workplace organising and industrial action. Sometimes a sell-out official has started as a militant, but succumbed to the pressures of office. Sometimes they have been in the bosses' pocket from the start.

There are many such tame-cat union leaderships—the Shop Distributive and Allied (SDA) union leaders are an example of the worst sort. They constantly do sweetheart deals over the heads of the membership and use their base to pursue a right-wing Christian moralist agenda.

At all times we seek to organise the ranks, to increase the numbers, morale and fighting strength of the union membership.

When union leaderships act to forward those goals, we support them. If they do not, we work with other militants to pressure the leaders. If that is not effective, we work with others to organise rank-and-file action independently and develop an alternative leadership. In the early twentieth century words of J. T. Murphy in *The Miners' Next Step*: "If the leaders won't lead, the rank and file must".

C. Unions and political representation: building the working-class political alternative

Unions cannot abstain from politics. Solidarity is not only among unionists, but also for all those whom capitalism does over.

That means unions need to encourage debate on broad political issues amongst the ranks and build a base of support for action around those issues.

Come election time, unions have a responsibility to their members to work for a government of the workers.

In Australia, most unions have seen the Australian Labor Party (ALP) as their party—either through formal affiliation or through informal ties (e.g. the teachers' unions have rarely been affiliated, but their officials have generally been in the ALP and they have worked hard to return ALP governments in elections).

Socialist Alliance works towards a break by militant unions to build a mass class-struggle workers' party.

As steps along this road:

- We argue for unions to take a stand on politics and to involve their membership in those debates;
- Where unions are affiliated to the ALP, precise tactics will vary. We argue for the union to seriously take up the fight against the pro-capitalist politics of the ALP leaders;
- We stress the need for unions to organise publicly for pro-worker politics. We argue against secret deals with ALP leaders and governments;
- Where there is a move towards disaffiliation from the ALP, we argue for rank-and-file debate and conscious, democratic choice by the union membership instead of intra-bureaucratic factional maneuvering;
- Disaffiliation on the basis of "anti-political" conservative politics is no advance—what is needed is a concrete alternative that will improve the union members' political representation;
- For disaffiliation from the ALP to be political step forward, there needs to be a process of generating rank-and-file involvement in the decision as to what alternative political proposal the union should adopt;
- Socialist Alliance will take every possible opportunity to promote, initiate and/or host debate and discussion on the road to rebuilding an authentic political voice for working people, within individual unions and across the movement as a whole; and
- Socialist Alliance does not, at the present stage of its development, encourage unions to affiliate directly to it. We do urge unions to fund political parties, Socialist Alliance

included, to the degree that the union membership judges that such parties advance their interests.

D. What Socialist Alliance needs to do in unions

Socialist Alliance offers big possibilities for a trade union practice that goes beyond that of any individual affiliate. In many unions, Socialist Alliance has a substantial number of members. If we organise them and develop well-grounded perspectives, we can have a big impact.

Already Socialist Alliance is beginning to be seen as an organising force among militant workers.

Our work this far has been limited, but promising. We have built successful meetings in solidarity with the Skilled Six and Workers First and have made a start on organising networks in particular unions.

The Trade Union Solidarity Committee in Melbourne is a useful initiative—holding regular forums and producing a trade union bulletin.

Socialist Alliance needs to prepare for long-term consistent work—this is a perspective over years, not days or months.

To have an impact in the unions, Socialist Alliance needs to:

- Be active on the day-to-day issues of wages and working conditions;
 - Propose campaigns around key issues (shorter working week etc);
 - Work to rebuild delegate structure, workplace meetings and trade union democracy and participation;
 - Propose campaigns that extend and defend the interests of the members of individual unions and organized labour as a whole (for example, shorter working week, repeal of the Workplace Relations Act, against full privatization of Telstra, in defence of Medicare);
 - Promote solidarity with unions and unionists that are being victimized and attacked by the state and the bosses;
 - Integrate struggles over the special needs and concerns of women workers and people of colour;
 - Consistently take an internationalist, working-class approach, especially to "difficult" issues (refugees, racism), in this way, combatting Australian nationalism and xenophobia;
 - Be in the forefront of campaigns to organize and unionise unorganised workers, especially young workers, and;
 - Maintain a flexible attitude to existing rank-and-file formations and class-struggle leaderships. We will apply the principle that we support leaders when they lead.
- To be able seriously to take up these goals, Socialist Alliance will undertake the following.
- Establish Socialist Alliance networks in individual unions at local, state and national level, open to non-Socialist Alliance members and operating as loose collectives based on consensus;
 - As these networks develop their organisation and a perspective for the union, they should consider establishing workplace and/or union-wide bulletins as well as

establishing and/or strengthening—with others—a broader militant and democratic formation;

- The networks will promote alternative policies and democratic, militant unionism in union elections. This may mean supporting existing leaderships that are leading struggles (for example, the Victorian CFMEU, AMWU Workers First, TCFUA) or participating in electoral challenges;
- Seek to recruit unionists into the Socialist Alliance. We aim to become a major resource for militant unionists.

- As appropriate, establish local, state and national cross-union committees (e.g. the Victorian Trade Union Solidarity Committee) open to non-Socialist Alliance members;
- Develop Socialist Alliance trade union publications (state and national) as organisation of our work develops; and
- Hold education and training forums and workshops on the history of struggles, debates in the union movement and organising methods, in order to develop both the practical skills and political analysis of unionists. ■

DISCUSSION

NSW state elections in the seat of Lismore

By Tom Flanagan (*Lismore branch*)

This is an initial analysis of the results in the 2003 compared to the 1999 state election, followed by some speculation as to the reasons for the results, and some broad perspectives for the future.

<i>Seat of Lismore</i>	1999 results	%
<i>Dhu, Christian Democratic Party</i>		3.67
<i>Canales, Independent</i>		0.80
<i>George, National Party</i>		39.17
<i>Corkill, Greens</i>		9.73
<i>Thorpe, Earthsave</i>		0.77
<i>Howard, Liberal Party</i>		13.52
<i>Bell, Labor Party</i>		27.70
<i>Ward, Timbarra Clean Water Party</i>		0.56
<i>Wunsch, Democratic Socialists</i>		0.83
<i>Walsh, Australian Democrats</i>		3.26

<i>Seat of Lismore</i>	2003 results	%
<i>Griffith, Independent</i>		1.76
<i>Fredman, Socialist Alliance</i>		0.68
<i>Lanyon, Labor Party</i>		25.36
<i>Corkill, Greens</i>		14.66
<i>George, National Party</i>		56.02
<i>Melland, Australian Democrats</i>		1.51

To understand the changes in voting patterns from 1999 to 2003 we first need to adjust for the fact that different parties contested the two elections and make some assumptions as to where the votes from 1999 would have gone if the candidates standing in 2003 were standing then.

It would be reasonable to assume that the vast majority of votes for the Liberal Party in 1999 would have gone to the National Party in 2003, since the Liberals didn't stand this time. Similarly the votes for the conservative Christian Democratic Party (CDP) would have gone mostly to the Nationals. (Here we need to take off about one per cent from the CDP vote which would have been a "donkey" vote—that is, about one per cent of voters who put a 1 on the top box regardless of who the candidate is. While the CDP benefited from this in 1999, the independent Angela Griffith got the donkey vote in 2003.

So the real change in the Nationals vote from 1999 to 2003 is approximately:

(NP 39.17% + Lib 13.52% + CDP 3.67%—1% donkey vote) = 55.36% in 1999 to National Party against 56.02% in 2003

So the 2003 election saw a positive swing in first preference votes to the Nationals of 0.66%

As far as the Green vote goes, in 1999 there were three green and environmental parties running. The Greens 9.73%, Timbarra Clean Water Party 0.56%, and Earthsave 0.77%.

So the change in the Green vote from 1999 to 2003 is approximately: GRN 9.73% + TCW 0.56% + ES 0.77% = 11.06% to Greens against 14.66% in 2003.

So there has been a positive swing in the first preference Green vote in 2003 of 3.6%

In 1999 an independent took 0.80% of the vote. While votes for two independents can't really be compared, we can note that this time the independent got 1.76% including the donkey vote. If we deduct one per cent for the donkey vote (1.76%—1% = 0.76%) we get about the same figure as the independent vote last time. So the estimate for the independent vote in 1999 (including a 1% donkey vote), is 1.80%

The Australian Democrats vote dropped from 3.26% in 1999 to 1.51% in 2003

The only remaining votes in 1999 were for the Democratic Socialists at 0.83%. The Democratic Socialists are now part of the Socialist Alliance, which got a vote of 0.68% in 2003. So the socialist vote has experienced a small negative swing of 0.15%.

Below is a table of the 2003 candidates with 1999 votes estimated as above, followed by 2003 votes.

Candidate	1999	2003	Swing
<i>Independent</i>	1.80	1.76	0.04% against
<i>Socialist Alliance</i>	0.83	0.68	0.15% against
<i>Labor Party</i>	27.70	25.36	2.34% against
<i>Green</i>	11.06	14.66	3.60% for
<i>Nationals</i>	55.36	56.02	0.66% for
<i>Australian Democrats</i>	3.26	1.51	1.75% against

Where have the swinging votes gone?

The swing to the Greens is likely to include the 1.75% of votes the Australian Democrats lost due to the complete public disarray that party has experienced. It is likely that the 0.15% the Socialists lost also went to the Greens as a result of the positive momentum and higher media profile the Greens currently have, especially with the expectation among some Green supporters that the Greens could actually win the seat of Lismore. That leaves a 1.7% swing to the Greens still to account for, which probably came from former Labor Party voters.

This leaves about 0.6% of the swing against Labor still to account for. This probably went to the Nationals as a result of support for the war on Iraq causing a small proportion of Labor voters to change their vote to the Nationals.

Obviously in real life, the voting patterns and reasons for changing votes aren't so simple. Nevertheless this gives an approximate picture of what happened in the 2003 state election in the seat of Lismore.

One more outcome is worth looking at—the two-party preferred vote, that is, the vote after the distribution of preferences. The final two-party-preferred vote was Labor 37%, Nationals 63%. In 1999 the figures were 41.48% and 58.52%, indicating a swing to the Nationals of 4.5% in the two-party preferred vote in 2003.

We would expect Labor to get Green, Socialist and most Democrat preferences (Green 14.66 + Socialist Alliance 0.68 + AD 1.51 = 16.85%).

The Labor vote before preferences were counted was 25.36%. Including preferences that vote went up to 37.01%, an increase of 11.65%. The benefit of up to five per cent of the preference flow was lost to Labor. This could have been crucial if the outcome were closer.

While the Socialist Alliance and the Australian Democrats advocated preferencing Labor on their "How To Votes" the Greens did not. It seems that up to one third of Green voters may have simply copied the Greens "How To Vote" and put a 1 beside the Green candidate and not allocated any further preferences.

In a closer election this may have resulted in the Nationals winning a seat that could have been won by Labor.

Such a preference policy in a tighter election statewide could even give us a Coalition government when the majority of voters would have actually preferred a Labor one. While Labor are bad, the Nationals and the Coalition are clearly worse.

In fact, most of the apparent swing to the Nationals in Lismore on a two-party-preferred basis could be accounted for by the exhaustion of Green preferences. This would leave the Nationals with a bigger proportion of a smaller total number of votes after preferences were allocated. (Those votes that fail to allocate preferences to either of one of the major parties simply disappear from the count.)

While following a party's "How To Vote" is obviously optional, that doesn't mean that parties should be indifferent to the way their preferences flow, or to whether their preferences don't flow at all. The Greens should look at this outcome when deciding preference policies in future.

Speculation: why did we get the result we did?

In the end the real increase in support for the Coalition was probably much smaller than the two-party preferred swing to the Nationals of 4.5% on paper. We would need to know the proportion of votes exhausted before preferencing the major parties last election and this election, and the real preferences of those voters before this could be known accurately.

Undoubtedly the fact of the war on Iraq was significant in a number of ways, probably impacting on voters in both directions.

The anti-war sentiment definitely boosted the vote for the Greens who already came into the election campaign with significant electoral momentum.

While Labor was caught in the middle on the war issue, the fact that Labor displayed big posters at Lismore booths

saying "Labor opposes war on Iraq" indicates they were trying to stop the drift of their vote to the Greens.

The Nationals were the clear beneficiaries of any pro-war vote from Labor supporters.

The Democrats suffered from their own internal problems and seem to be on the way out politically. Since their organisation is totally oriented to seats in parliament, without parliamentary seats they are nothing.

The Socialist Alliance, while playing a central role and getting some visibility in the anti-war campaign, and getting positive feedback from many anti-war activists, was swamped by the Greens in terms of broader public profile on the anti-war issue, both locally and nationally. Those not actively involved in the anti-war campaign would have seen the Greens as the main anti-war party in Lismore.

So while the Socialist Alliance did not benefit noticeably from the anti-war vote, we have made important gains through our anti-war work in terms of networking and profile with other activists and organisations. .

Running in the elections also gave us an extra platform to address the public on anti-war and broader issues. The benefit of this increased profile and standing will stay with us now that this election campaign is over.

Our gains in public standing in the anti-war campaign, and the election campaign, are effectively hidden in the election results behind the first preference vote for the Greens. Many Socialist Alliance canvassers had voters coming back saying we voted for you straight after the Greens! The presence of Socialist Alliance canvassers on the booths, and our anti-war posters and information would have reinforced our public profile gained through the campaign and so was an important part of consolidating our work in the election campaign and in the anti-war movement.

The large electoral shadow that the Greens are casting should not blind us to the gains we are making in our standing among the general public. Standing that needs to be converted into a stronger and larger organisation by joining new members and getting them to play an active role in the Socialist Alliance.

As the Australian political landscape continues to develop, Socialist Alliance faces two possible scenarios. We could find ourselves working alongside and in collaboration to an increasingly radical Green Party. Alternatively, if the Greens fail to rise to the challenges posed by a radicalising political situation, we can potentially emerge from their electoral shadow as the radical pole of attraction in Australian politics.

In either case we need to continue to build the largest and strongest organisation possible to be ready to meet the challenges of the future. ■

Perspectives for the Socialist Alliance—by an unaffiliated member

By Kiraz Janicke (Perth branch)

Note: This contribution was inadvertently left out of Discussion Bulletin Volume 3 Number 1. The apologies of the national office go to comrade Kiraz Janicke for this oversight.

I am writing in relation to my perspectives on the Socialist Alliance as a non-affiliated member and in regards to the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) proposal to cease operating as a public organization and function as a tendency within the Alliance. Within the context of the debate surrounding the DSP proposal there has arisen a number of issues, notably the debate on “reform versus revolution”. I joined the Socialist Alliance for a number of reasons, firstly on the understanding that it was more than simply an “electoral united front” as seemed to be intimated to me in section 3.3 of the Constitution, under the aims and objectives of the Socialist Alliance which states, “A sustained mass campaign of total opposition to the ruling class offensive can bring together the forces to replace capitalism with a socialist society...” The words “total opposition” in particular, seem to imply more than parliamentary intervention. From this it follows that the objective of the Socialist Alliance’s engagement in electoral politics is simply a means of building a movement and supporting workers’ struggles to the ultimate end, that of replacing capitalism with a socialist society. History has shown that capitalism cannot simply be reformed—therefore I agree with John Percy when he argues that as socialists we should not deny the intrinsic revolutionary orientation of the Socialist Alliance. This is not to say that the Alliance will necessarily be the revolutionary or vanguard party of the future. However, if we compromise on the fundamental issue, then frankly what is the point? The danger of ignoring the intrinsic revolutionary orientation of the Socialist Alliance is the creation of another purely reformist social-democratic party. This would be a profound waste of time! However, whilst maintaining a revolutionary orientation the Alliance should also engage in patient united front work with left social-democratic forces i.e. Greens etc, fighting for reforms in the interests of building the biggest possible movement against capitalism.

It has been suggested by various comrades within the Alliance that the Alliance should remain purely an “electoral united front” and that to adopt a revolutionary orientation would frighten prospective members of the Alliance. However, if the Alliance is to be perceived purely as an, “electoral united front”, then what are the objectives of the various affiliate organizations that proclaim themselves to be “revolutionary”? Why should they even bother with the Alliance “project” at all? It seems to me that the only objective can be to recruit independent members of the Alliance to their particular organization. This indicates a basic contradiction in the functioning of the Alliance whereby the affiliate organizations are divided between building themselves and building the Socialist Alliance in the interests of left unity. This can only impede the future growth and development of the Alliance. Another argument

presented in favour of the Alliance as an “electoral united front” is the assumption that the majority of independent members generally ascribe to a reformist position and the only “true revolutionaries” are those that belong to the various affiliate organizations. On the contrary, many non-affiliated members of the Alliance hold revolutionary positions, but refrain from joining the affiliate organizations because they are disgusted by the sectarianism engaged in by members of these organizations. It has been argued that the increased activity of non-affiliated members around the electoral functions of the Alliance is a further indication of their reformism. However the perception of the Alliance as an, “electoral united front” with no real infrastructure (i.e. a publication, a more encompassing platform etc), serves to restrict the active participation of non-affiliated members and focuses primarily on the interests of the affiliate groups and their perceptions of the Alliance, with the views of the independent members being largely incidental. Many independent members of the Alliance joined because they want to be part of an organization that is free from sectarianism, but also presents a revolutionary position. In consideration of these issues, if the revolutionary orientation of the Socialist Alliance becomes too severely compromised then I believe many independent members will become disillusioned with the Alliance.

Secondly, I joined the Socialist Alliance because it represented a major force for left unity. As mentioned above many independents refrain from joining the affiliate organizations, not because they are skeptics, as has been suggested, or that they are reformist, but because they can’t stand the sectarianism, whereby one particular group or other claim to be the only “true revolutionaries” in Australia. The irony of this is the sad fact that most Australians are not even aware that the various affiliate organizations exist. Sectarianism has served to dissipate the energy of socialist activists for decades and is indicative of a general inertia and conservative reluctance to move forward. The issue of sectarianism should not be dismissed lightly as this is a genuine concern of independents within the Alliance and is a severe impediment to the growth and development of a working class movement in this country. The theoretical differences between the affiliate organizations are infinitesimal as opposed to those that divide us from capitalism and, as Simon Butler asks, do they “really justify separate organizational forms?” This is not to say that theoretical perspectives are not important, on the contrary, they are very important. That is why genuine democratic debate is necessary as opposed to demagogic, sectarian mudslinging, which actually operates to stifle debate. In the current political situation left unity is more crucial than ever. The revolutionary left needs to rise to meet these challenges; we need to be united in building a movement of “total opposition” to capitalism and war. If the left does not provide a concrete alternative this will only pave the way for right-wing populist forces.

Capitalism is in crisis, the alternatives are clear, as Rosa Luxemburg said—“socialism or barbarism”.

On this note I would like to say I believe that the DSP proposal to cease operating publicly and function as a tendency within the Alliance is a genuine proposal to facilitate left unity and devote more time, energy and resources to the Alliance, as opposed to an attempt to take over the Alliance. I think the DSP is aware as well as anyone of the disastrous effect this would have on the Alliance if this were the case, and, as noted by Dick Nichols, the Socialist Alliance operates within its own democratic framework which would prohibit any move in this direction. Therefore I believe any fears as to the nature of the DSP’s proposal are unfounded. Obviously, there are issues that need to be taken into consideration, for instance the name and editorial composition of an Alliance publication and other particulars. However, I believe these issues can be resolved democratically within the Alliance itself. In light of this I would urge other affiliate organizations to seriously consider the DSP proposal and perhaps a similar course of action themselves. In relation to the possibility of the ISO or any other affiliate organization terminating their affiliation to the Alliance, I believe this would be detrimental to their own interests as it would undermine their credibility and commitment to left unity in the eyes of the independent members of the Alliance as well as unionists and left activists outside the Alliance. This would be a more devastating blow to left unity than any proposal to operate as a tendency within the Alliance. I believe many other non-affiliated members of the Alliance, would be profoundly disappointed if this were to happen.

It has been argued that the Alliance as a multi-tendency socialist party along the lines of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) would be a reformist organization based on the “lowest common denominator”. However, the perception of the Alliance as purely an “electoral united front” is definitely reformist in character and already is the lowest common denominator. We need to explore and expand on areas of agreement between the affiliate organizations to reach the highest common denominator—debating the draft platform presented by Dick Nichols is an excellent way to achieve this. Various

affiliate groups have intimated that although they are in favour of revolutionary regroupment some time in the future, the Alliance is not the appropriate place for this. A question arises: what then is the appropriate forum for regroupment? If we are to take “clarity of perspective” as a necessary precondition to revolutionary regroupment, as argued by David Glanz (although I am certain the Bolsheviks themselves did not agree 100% on theoretical perspectives), then obviously there are problems. However, Sue Johnson argues that it is not so much “differences in theories, but in terms of how we respond to the challenges and concrete tasks thrown up by the period” that determine the success of regroupment. It’s not a matter of just waiting for regroupment to eventually happen, it is a dialectical process of debating the issues, putting our ideas into practice, assessing the outcomes from this and moving forward. The experience of the Alliance has shown that there are commonalities between the affiliate organizations, both theoretically and organizationally that can be built on. There are lessons to be learned on all sides. A multi-tendency socialist party with a revolutionary orientation would facilitate left unity and possibly serve as a transitional party to revolutionary regroupment in the future.

The issue of Resistance adopting a relationship of political solidarity with the Alliance along the lines of its current relationship with the DSP as outlined by Simon Butler [see “Building a united socialist youth movement” in the *Discussion Bulletin* Volume 2 Number 5], is another matter altogether. While I am convinced of the integrity of the proposition and am not opposed to it on a personal level, (the name is immaterial to me), I think it would alienate members of other affiliate organizations. The issue of a youth organization to operate in solidarity with the Alliance is obviously very important and needs to be discussed further.

I do not believe this debate should be open-ended; frankly we don’t have the time. This is not to say this should happen over night, it is obviously an ongoing process, but people need to be open to discussion and willing to move forward. To put it crudely, do we want to sit around in our “revolutionary” cliques “wanking our egos” for another 30 odd years, or are people genuinely interested in creating change? There’s a world to win! ■

Designing a Socialist Alliance stall

By Dave Riley (Brisbane district)

BRISBANE: Socialist Alliance here has been running an antiwar stall in the main square everyday since Tuesday so when folk turn up for rallies and such it’s like them dropping in on your home. One of the frustrations I have been dealing with is trying to find a way to highlight the stall more—especially when thousands of people are present, listening to speeches or just milling. Here is a discussion on this highly practical issue in DIY terms:

1. When there’s a crowd, people obscure your stall and block it from view. Over the last month I experimented with a mobile stall approach—like the trays hot dog or ice cream sellers have at football matches and film screenings. Unfortunately there is not enough room in the width of a

standard human for a large display of literature, etc so I abandoned the effort.

2. If you put a banner behind the stall it will catch the wind and unless you have people at both ends it will fall over. Any banner will also obscure view of the stall from behind.

3. While banners in the front, hung from the tabletop of the stall, work they have limited visibility and a flat card table stall only really works as a display—once folk are right on it and looking down.

4. So the main approach to attract attention is to go UP. But given wind, sightlines and access—going UP can present logistical problems.

5. The answer I think is to employ insignias. Since I've done a bit of puppetry I've always been interested in flat type puppetry figures—especially Indonesian *wayang klitik*. These are basically insignias/figures on a stick cut out in profile. Think of the old Roman legions and the insignias they carried—golden eagles and wreaths on tall sticks. Another inspiration are the flag emblems often worn by Samurai troops during the shogun wars. These were attached to the back of the warrior and displayed an identification in Japanese characters.

6. MAKING THE INSIGNIA: You can either cut out an already existing image/graphic or you can design your own on quality poster paper or Styrofoam. The main thing is to ensure it isn't too big such that it will catch the wind—no more than half a metre wide is probably your limit. And don't make the design square or junky as that too will be wind-blown. Use an in-and-out silhouette approach to your design.

7. BACKING THE INSIGNIA: I use Styrofoam as I love the material. Any old flat piece will do—you can get the stuff any where. Fruit and vegetable shops are the best source. Simply place your insignia pattern on the Styrofoam and draw the outline onto it with a biro or pencil. To cut out this shape, heat any knife on a gas stove—kitchen ranges are fine—and when it's hot slice along the outline like a knife through margarine. Fix your insignia to the Styrofoam backing with (PVA is best) glue.

8. PROTECTING THE INSIGNIA: While some grades of Styrofoam are better than others, you will/may need to protect the back of the insignia. To do this either wallpaper it all over with strips of masking tape or coat it with quality paper (kraft paper is the best) strips soaked in wallpaper paste or a PVA/water mix. Basically you paste the back of the insignia and coat the edges with the same material. I also coat the whole thing—front and back—with a layer of PVA glue. (don't use varnish as it will eat into the Styrofoam). PVA glue is also good to protect your paint job—especially if you use cheap acrylics—if it rains.

9. SUPPORTING THE INSIGNIA: Supporting an insignia from below (while using Styrofoam) presents a real

trick of design. Don't just insert a stick into the Styrofoam as it will break and come loose. I use satay sticks/bamboo skewers. These are available from any supermarket. Use as many as you can fit—6-10 is a good number. Insert their pointed ends into some glue then ram a line of them into the base of the Styrofoam, such that their blunt ends all face downwards and parallel to one another. Gather these and drag them together to form a fan. At the end wrap some masking tape around the lot to bring them and hold them together—and *voila* you have a *very* strong join.

10. RAISING THE INSIGNIA: While you could now attach this fan end to a stick/pole you can instead attach it to a piece of standard gauge black irrigation tubing with masking tape. The tubing is great to simply slide over the end of a pole and can easily be removed from that for storage and travel. Several insignias designed this way can be carried in a bag or strung together like a necklace while the poles are bundled and ferried separately.

11. PLACEMENT OF THE POLE/ROD: A standard light banner pole can be used for this job. The main thing is to ensure that the pole height is such that the insignia is carried to a height above the heads of those who will work the stall. So far I experimented with taping the pole to the stall table—which works fine (especially as the design is so light). Stretch clips will also do—but I'm thinking that a hole drilled in the outer edge of the card table will work much better while not weakening the table or taking up valuable table space. No doubt we could also find ways to attach light items to the pole (eg: literature, badges, etc near where it meets the table).

12. MISCELLANY: Table access is not obstructed either by those holding the stall and those visiting it. Yesterday I was able to stand among the crowd in front of the table and point them towards it because all we/they could see of its location was the insignia above the heads of the crowd.

If any one has further suggestions about this design I'd love to hear them. Similarly, I'm willing to talk people through their experiments if they contact me on dhell@optusnet.com.au. ■

Socialist Alliance in north east Melbourne—building our local anti-war group

By Rachel Evans (Melbourne North East branch)

Note: The following contribution was written in early February

Local anti-war groups started mushrooming—it was clearly time to get our local area responding to the war!

Fortunately we have had a radical base in the area through the recently established North East office of the Democratic Socialist Party. Last year Socialist Alliance had also had meetings and speak-outs around refugee rights—we had a certain following and base of supporters in the area. Time to activate them!

It was fairly easy to build the meetings by:

- Leafleting train stations with times;
- Calling current members;

- Calling progressive networks already established through the refugee campaign e.g. Greens, migrant services etc, and;

- putting a call out on the Victorian Peace Network (VPN) email list which gets out to about 3000 people.

The first Darebin Anti-War Group (DAWG) meeting had 22 people at it. The smallish Resistance Centre was packed to the brim with people angry against the war and wanting some action. The first meeting was held in mid January—Bush's war agenda was firmly established.

Meetings have got to between 10-30 people consistently: we have a core of 10 or so who are active and have organized a successful 15-strong speak-out, a

73-strong rally at Fairfield, have a public meeting coming up and another local war rally on February 15.

Politics of the group—what’s what in Melbourne?

The demands DAWG ended taking up reflected the legacy of the successful anti-Vietnam War movement and followed the lead of the Victorian Peace Network. “No US/UN War” and “Troops Out Now!” were the two main ones.

The Vietnam War campaign had massive debates about the demands the movement should take. “Peace Now! Negotiate!” was the demand argued for by the conservative wing of the movement—the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). During the Vietnam War to confuse the movement and give the impression of a considered approach both the Australian and United States governments called for “negotiations” with the Vietnamese Communist Party. Hence raising this as the crucial demands was confusing to people—why protest around something if the government is already implementing it?

Other, ultra-radical, sections of the campaign argued for “Victory to the VietCong” as the main demand. But this would have cut the movement off from a massive base of support. Most people wanted an end to the war and weren’t yet convinced of the need for a revolution—the key assistance activists could give the Vietnamese comrades was an end to the war. And to do that they needed the mass of support from the population. The demand taken by the movement “Australian Troops Out Now!” and “End The War!” were the demands that masses of people could rally around. It didn’t preclude them supporting the Vietnamese Communists and put the responsibility back on the forces we could affect—the Australian government. They had to respond to our unequivocal position.

So the demands taken on by the VPN reflect these debates held during the 1970s. We have seen the conservative wing of the movement—the ALP left—taking on the No US/UN War, Troops Out Now! demands without much of a fight. There has been no call from the ultra-radical section of the movement for victory to Hussein for obvious reasons. Instead this section of the movement have focused on building for narrow stunts instead of broader mass built actions. So the demands that will build the broadest support have been set without much of a debate.

Instead the differences as socialists that we have with the VPN down in Melbourne is more on the form in which this leadership body is taking. The VPN meets at an exclusive time and only allows representatives from organizations to attend (unions etc). It is not a body to

get people involved in the thinking out of the movement, the politics of the various forces involved, the demands, or the change in tactics that need to take place.

In comparison the Vietnam War campaign met in the city, with around 500 people on a regular basis. Thinking through the campaign—the next mobilizations, seeing the more conservative forces talk about how “tired they were” meant that, as socialists, we could argue to keep going, that we weren’t tired and helped sweep away illusions in these “leaders”.

Socialist Alliance and our work in our local groups

Building the local groups is crucial in activating new people and making sure this radical base continues to keep the less accountable leadership on a mass-movement trajectory.

When we do need a mass meeting in the city, activists will have had experience in making decisions, and putting forward arguments for mass actions that have clear demands.

So, we need to:

- Work with all the new activists coming around—great chance to talk politics!
- Talk up and build Socialist Alliance and why people should join—capitalism needs war like humans need water—it can’t survive without it! Join the organization that is leading this struggle;
- Make sure we keep VPN accountable, and;
- Keep building the local actions to keep the street heat of the movement alive.

How we have fared

Socialist Alliance activists are at the forefront of DAWG. We have joined two key DAWG activists to the Alliance so far, with two more interested. Many non-active Socialist Alliance members are now involved in the campaign.

Our networking with the Greens has gone well—we are trying to get them more involved with one “rank-and-filer” involved—the rest are dragging their feet somewhat. The Ethnic Communities Council in the area is responding to our lead on the rally and the churches are very supportive.

The Melbourne North East Socialist Alliance branch could do with some more attention to building itself—our recruiting campaign needs more work! Some measures to try and get a branch committee up and running will alleviate some of that pressure and draw new activists into the branch.

Onwards and upwards as they say! Many steps forward are being taken in the red North East! ■

RESOLUTIONS OF THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

The following resolutions were all adopted at the March 22 hook-up of the National Executive.

No to the war Budget—yes to Medicare, education and welfare

Agreed unanimously: To endorse the proposal as outlined below.

Explanatory notes (by David Glanz)

The federal Budget will be handed down on Tuesday, May 13, two days after the Socialist Alliance national conference. It is already causing widespread concern, as Howard is making it clear that health, education, and welfare in all its forms (maternity pay, childcare, assistance for the unemployed, etc) will be sacrificed in order to increase military spending.

Whatever the situation with regard to fighting in Iraq, the Budget will signal a further war on Australian workers and their families. It will link anger over the attack on Iraq with the much longer term anger over economic rationalism/neo-liberalism.

The Budget will highlight not simply the Liberals' predatory and anti-people stance, but the class division in Australia. There is little chance that the 30% health insurance rebate will be cut to fund Medicare bulk-billing, for example.

The Budget is an important opportunity for the Alliance to put itself at the heart of many working class people's concerns over war and cutbacks and build a distinctive profile.

Action proposal

That the Socialist Alliance launch a national campaign—entitled “Stop the war on Medicare and

education”—around the upcoming Budget, such a campaign to include:

1. A national leaflet (a broadsheet published in *Green Left Weekly* and *Socialist Worker* with run-on copies?) attacking the Budget, exposing the government's long-term plans for increasing military spending, highlighting the needs of working class people, and arguing that we should be cutting military spending and taxing the rich to fund real increases in public spending, and calling for opposition parties to block supply.

2. A national poster.

3. A national petition calling for opposition parties to block the Budget, endorsed before it is circulated by key union and peace movement leaders in the public sector, in particular.

4. Public meetings with broad platforms (which could include, for example, a doctor or nurse, a teacher or childcare worker/unionist, a peace network activist, along with suitable Green or Labor left speakers).

5. Where possible, broad-based rallies or speakouts, including pickets of Liberal offices.

6. A public “launch” of the campaign at the Socialist Alliance conference.

7. In states and territories where the Alliance does not yet have electoral registration, we should use the momentum gained by this campaign to get the necessary number of members/signatures.

Relations with the Progressive Labor Party

Agreed unanimously: That the National Executive should reply to the invitation of the PLP for a meeting after the NSW elections with an acceptance letter

agreeing to a Socialist Alliance national leadership delegation meeting with a PLP delegation.

Second National Conference

(a) Organisational

Agreed unanimously: To adopt the same procedures as used in the Founding Conference as a guide for the Second National Conference (for details see Appendix 2 of minutes of the March 18 hook-up of the National Conveners, the June-July 2001 minutes of National Liaison Committee that determined organisation and procedure of Founding Conference).

(b) Draft documents and pre-conference discussion

Agreed by majority (12 for, 1 against, 1 abstention): That the two draft documents for the National Conference be published in the *Discussion*

Bulletin, the perspectives document in the name of Dick Nichols and the document on Socialist Alliance work in the unions in the name of the National Conveners, on the clear understanding that all affiliates, individual NE members and Socialist Alliance members generally are free to advance amendments, addenda and counterpositions to the documents.

For: Ruth Ratcliffe, Dave Riley, Dick Nichols, David Glanz, Michael Morphet, Pat Brewer, Riki Lane, Graham Matthews, Alex Bainbridge, David Lockwood, Greg Adler, Keiran Latty

Against: Alison Thorne

Abstention: Carlene Wilson

Attitude to the war on Iraq

On the basis of the Workers Power submission (see below), Carlene Wilson moved two motions, on which voting was as follows:

Agreed by majority (11-3): That Socialist Alliance supports the defeat of imperialism in the present war on Iraq.

For: Dick Nichols, Greg Adler, David Glanz, Alison Thorne, Carlene Wilson, Riki Lane, Graham Matthews, Ruth Ratcliffe, Pat Brewer, Alex Bainbridge, Dave Riley

Against: Keiran Latty, Michael Morphett, David Lockwood

Lost by majority (1 for, 6 against, 7 abstentions)
That industrial action is the main means for stopping the war on Iraq and Australian involvement in it.

For: Carlene Wilson

Against: Greg Adler, Michael Morphett, David Lockwood, Pat Brewer, Alex Bainbridge, Dave Riley

Abstentions: Dick Nichols, Kieran Latty, David Glanz, Alison Thorne, Riki Lane, Graham Matthews, Ruth Ratcliffe,

Addendum: War and the Socialist Alliance

With the war on Iraq ready to start any day it's important that the Socialist Alliance does not fudge its position.

As socialists, revolutionary socialists, we have to do more than oppose the war on moral grounds. We have to be consistent anti-imperialists. And that means we have to be unequivocal—we are for the defence of Iraq and therefore the defeat of the imperialist troops.

Why is saying stop the war not enough on its own?

Because it is not just an end to the conflict we want. It is an end that does not leave Iraq first invaded and then occupied by a US military regime.

Because we are not opposed to war in the abstract. We're opposed to the US, Britain and Australia's desire to turn Iraq into a new colony for themselves.

Because we recognize that there is a fundamental difference between the imperialist nations, including junior imperialists like Australia, and nations like Iraq.

Because we know that the real enemy is not the people of Iraq and not even Saddam Hussein but our own rulers and their US masters.

Response to slander in the *Australian Jewish News*

Agreed unanimously: To demand of the *Australian Jewish News* both a formal apology and right of reply to the article in question.

Appendix: letter from Australian Jewish News

David Glanz
International Socialist Organisation
dglanz@netstra.com.au
Dick Nichols
Democratic Socialist Party
dicknichols@dsp.org.au

The right in Australia have tried to fill us with fear by making the argument that anti-war protestors are giving support to Hussein. The Socialist Alliance need not be afraid of such accusations. We are clearly politically opposed to Saddam Hussein. Unlike the hypocritical leaders of the imperialist bloc, we have condemned his treatment of the Kurdish people from the start.

It is this that gives us the authority to say we will defend Iraq, because it is only the people of Iraq, free from imperialist invasion, that can rid themselves of all dictators.

Nationalism is endemic in the Australian union movement. The only way to fight this is for the Socialist Alliance to take it on unambiguously. To defend Iraq and bring about its victory over imperialism, we need to be for the defeat of our own nation's troops.

Alongside a clear position in defence of Iraq, Socialist Alliance needs to extend its good trade union statements around the war.

The stoppages that have already been agreed to are a good first step. They show a will on the part of militant trade unionists and some sections of the union officialdom to make a stand against the war. But we need more than symbolic acts if we are to stop the war altogether.

There needs to be massive civil disobedience in connection with a general strike. Not for one hour or one day or even two—but till the conflict is over.

And we have to say that part of this means bans on all military supplies. Munitions, equipment, the movement of troops and yes, food.

Unlike the unions trying to pull back from accusations of being close to treason, the Socialist Alliance has to be clear that we want Australian troops, US and British troops and of course even UN sanctioned troops, to be unable to fight. And that means stopping all their supplies.

With such a clear position—defence of Iraq, defeat of "our own" troops and the use of our power as workers to stop the war, Socialist Alliance will have a real tool for building the biggest possible anti-war movement and for showing itself as the organization of and for the working class both at home and internationally.

19 March 2003

Dear Mr Glanz and Mr Nichols

I would like to apologise for an inadvertent error in a story on Angela Budai which will appear in the March 21, 2003 edition of the *Australian Jewish News*.

A quote from her should have read: "The problem with [the International Socialist Organisation and Democratic Socialist Party] is that the way they express themselves can be perceived as antisemitic."

Due to a problem in our production system, the following quote has been printed: "The problem with

[the International Socialist Organisation and Democratic Socialist Party] is that they have antisemitic views.”

Sincerely
Aviva Bard

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